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RED RECORDS

ALICE PERRIN

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EAST OF SUEZ

'A collection of cleverly-written stories which, the Baron thinks it is not too much to say, for graphic description, sharp, incisive sketches of character, and effective, dramatic situation, are second only to the "Plain Tales," by Rudyard Kipling; while two or three of them run even the best of Kipling's uncommonly close.'—*Punch.*

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JAMES BAXTER, Executive Engineer in the Indian Public Works Department, Irrigation Branch, was an official whose merits had met with deserved, if unexpected, recognition from Government. Already had he received one step of promotion out of his turn, and it was whispered that his name stood next on the confidential list for a Superintending Engineership. He was clever, capable, hard-working, and had studied the language till he could speak with, and listen to, the peasants of his province in complete understanding of their wants, prejudices, and superstitions; and no man knew how to organise and control a vast army of coolies on a big construction better than himself.

Mrs. James Baxter was a plain, wiry little woman, who never flagged during the hot weather, kept her health throughout the rains, loved camp life, riding, shooting, walking, and was indifferent to

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One cold weather's morning the Baxters sat at their twelve o'clock breakfast in a comfortable single-pole tent. The entrance-flaps and fine cane blinds were rolled up, and in the clear distance, under the brilliant noon-day sky, they could see the long line of heavy earthwork that, when finished, was to carry the new canal over a deep depression in the country. The great embankment, rough-hewn and crudely yellow, was swarming with coolies that showed in moving dots, lines, and masses, some digging, others bearing on their heads baskets, empty or full, of soil. Baxter was in charge of twenty miles of new canal under construction. He controlled the cutting of the main channel with its distributaries and escapes, the raising of embankments, the building of bridges and drainage crossings, and was in primary authority

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over the thousands of coolies employed on the works. There were coolie camps, coolie hospitals, coolie markets, coolie arrangements of every description to be supervised, for train-loads of the Indian labourer had been supplied from outlying districts, in addition to the men, women, and children who offered their services from villages in the immediate neighbourhood.

All day the Executive Engineer inspected, ordered, directed, along the line of construction, and in the evenings he sat late at his office-table over reports, designs, estimates, and accounts. His wife aided him in so far as she sympathised with intelligence when he talked to her of his work,—and just now he seldom talked of anything else—took care that he had good and sufficient food, insisted that he should rest at intervals, wrote all the home letters on both sides, managed their private money matters, and never distracted him with domestic difficulties or details.

Now, as he concluded his breakfast with eggs laid by the English fowls that frequently visited the tent in search of Mrs. Baxter, he opened his official letters, long, drab-coloured missives "On His Majesty's Service," that lay in a heap by his plate.

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"You know I applied for an extra assistant the other day?" he said. "They're sending me a fellow called Thorne—Basil Thorne. He's been doing secretarial work in the Chief's office, and thank goodness he's got a few years' service, so he can't be an absolute idiot. They speak well of his ability."

Mrs. Baxter had also been reading a letter. "The Chief has written to me about him," she said, a little diffidently.

"The Chief? To you?"—looking up in astonishment—"what on earth for?"

She threw him over the letter. "It's marked 'confidential,'" she said, and added, "he's the Chief's nephew."

Baxter read it quickly; then skimmed it again half aloud, his eyebrows drawn together in vexation:

"'. . . Sending my young nephew, Basil Thorne, to your husband—grateful if you would keep an eye on the fellow—desirable he should be removed from a bad influence—married woman—great pity—will get over it with plenty of work and no time to think—only wants to be kept out of the way till the lady has gone home or picked up somebody else. . . .' Well, I'm blowed!" Baxter threw the letter down on the table and it fluttered to the

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floor. "I wish to goodness the Chief would stick to his official business and manage the private affairs of his relations himself. It's simply infernal —here am I badly wanting an energetic, hard-working assistant who'll be out all day and all night too if necessary, and think of nothing but his work, and I'm to get a mooning, love-sick ass of a chap who'll forget his orders if he ever listens to 'em, and write letters to the woman instead of his reports, and give me a lot more bother than I've got already. I *must* have a good man at my elbow, with Jackson ten miles off and May at the other end of the division, and I can't move either of them or give them any more to do than they've got already. They're overworked as it is—" And James Baxter rose and paced the blue-and-white drugget in irritable agitation.

"Well, dear, wait and see," soothed his wife; "he may turn out to be just what you want, and if hard work is all that is needed to cure the poor creature of his infatuation, he certainly will recover here. You see"—she reclaimed the letter and glanced through it again—"the Chief says he is clever and a good sort; I'm sure he wouldn't send you a fool with all this work going on. What a wretch that woman must be! Don't worry before

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you need, James; if the boy is all right as regards his work, that's all you want; if he isn't, you must clamour for somebody else."

"Yes, and in the meantime do the work of three men myself, and have Jackson and May going sick from over-exposure and want of rest. Well, I suppose he must come, and if he seems any use you'll have to tackle him and knock all the sentimental nonsense out of his head. *I* can't be bothered with his morals. If he does what I tell him, I ask nothing more."

"I expect it will be all right," said Mrs. Baxter encouragingly; "the Chief knows."

Then, being wise, she turned to another topic, and presently persuaded the tired, nerve-strained man to give himself a brief rest, for he had been out in the sun since dawn, and a long, wearisome inspection awaited him that afternoon.

The new assistant appeared a few days later. Mr. Baxter had sent a pony to meet him at the nearest railway station some thirty miles distant, and a bullock-cart for his sleeping-tent and camp furniture. It had been arranged that he was to feed with the Baxters, seeing that his position at present was to be somewhat that of personal assistant to his Executive Engineer. On his arrival

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society. She knew almost as much about regulation, distribution, and construction as did Baxter; and the junior Assistant Engineers, planted at intervals along the division, were as anxious for her approval of their work as they were for the commendation of their superior officer. The unmarried men who came under her husband's authority were always devoted to Mrs. Baxter. She nursed them when they fell sick with fever, dysentery, boils, or any of the ailments common to the country; she "ran" a book and paper club for them; scolded them and their servants when they grew careless about milk and drinking water; advised them as to the management of goats, cows, fowls, and the ordering of stores from Bombay; was ever ready to receive confidences, and often prevented them from drifting into disastrous marriages with daughters or sisters of subordinates.

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Mrs. Baxter had also been reading a letter. "The Chief has written to me about him," she said, a little diffidently.

"The Chief? To you?"—looking up in astonishment—"what on earth for?"

She threw him over the letter. "It's marked 'confidential,'" she said, and added, "he's the Chief's nephew."

Baxter read it quickly; then skimmed it again half aloud, his eyebrows drawn together in vexation:

"'. . . Sending my young nephew, Basil Thorne, to your husband—grateful if you would keep an eye on the fellow—desirable he should be removed from a bad influence—married woman—great pity—will get over it with plenty of work and no time to think—only wants to be kept out of the way till the lady has gone home or picked up somebody else. . . .' Well, I'm blowed!" Baxter threw the letter down on the table and it fluttered to the

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floor. "I wish to goodness the Chief would stick to his official business and manage the private affairs of his relations himself. It's simply infernal —here am I badly wanting an energetic, hard-working assistant who'll be out all day and all night too if necessary, and think of nothing but his work, and I'm to get a mooning, love-sick ass of a chap who'll forget his orders if he ever listens to 'em, and write letters to the woman instead of his reports, and give me a lot more bother than I've got already. I *must* have a good man at my elbow, with Jackson ten miles off and May at the other end of the division, and I can't move either of them or give them any more to do than they've got already. They're overworked as it is—" And James Baxter rose and paced the blue-and-white drugget in irritable agitation.

"Well, dear, wait and see," soothed his wife; "he may turn out to be just what you want, and if hard work is all that is needed to cure the poor creature of his infatuation, he certainly will recover here. You see"—she reclaimed the letter and glanced through it again—"the Chief says he is clever and a good sort; I'm sure he wouldn't send you a fool with all this work going on. What a wretch that woman must be! Don't worry before

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you need, James; if the boy is all right as regards his work, that's all you want; if he isn't, you must clamour for somebody else."

"Yes, and in the meantime do the work of three men myself, and have Jackson and May going sick from over-exposure and want of rest. Well, I suppose he must come, and if he seems any use you'll have to tackle him and knock all the sentimental nonsense out of his head. *I* can't be bothered with his morals. If he does what I tell him, I ask nothing more."

"I expect it will be all right," said Mrs. Baxter encouragingly; "the Chief knows."

Then, being wise, she turned to another topic, and presently persuaded the tired, nerve-strained man to give himself a brief rest, for he had been out in the sun since dawn, and a long, wearisome inspection awaited him that afternoon.

The new assistant appeared a few days later. Mr. Baxter had sent a pony to meet him at the nearest railway station some thirty miles distant, and a bullock-cart for his sleeping-tent and camp furniture. It had been arranged that he was to feed with the Baxters, seeing that his position at present was to be somewhat that of personal assistant to his Executive Engineer. On his arrival

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he was shown into the big tent,—a tall, dark youth, looking older than his age, with a slight stoop, a clean-shaven face and clever mouth, but sullen, resentful eyes. He wore well-cut riding clothes, and carried a little silver-mounted cane in his hand. Mrs. Baxter noticed the stick, for he did not lay it aside with his hat, but sat holding it across his knees; she thought how oddly effeminate it looked in contrast to the rest of his appearance. He accepted tea, but spoke little beyond explaining in sulky apology that his bearer had refused at the last moment to accompany him "into the jungle," and that, in consequence, he was without a servant.

"Never mind," said Mrs. Baxter, "our man is sure to have a relation he can write to and engage for you, and in the meantime amongst all that crowd on the works there may be some creature who has been a bearer, or at any rate knows enough of the work to do stop-gap. I will have inquiries made to-morrow. My husband's bearer will look after you till you get some one."

Thorne remained ungratefully silent, and Baxter looked as though it might afford him some satisfaction to kick the new assistant. Nevertheless Mrs. Baxter fulfilled her promise. She ascertained that, as she had anticipated, their own man pos-

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sessed a relative who was a treasure, and would gladly take service with the junior sahib; but there would, of course, be the usual delay over his arrival—the journey was a long one—moreover his mother was just dead—he would need time to set his affairs in order, &c., &c.

Meanwhile the word had gone forth that the new sahib required a temporary servant, and long before Baxter and his assistant returned from the works for breakfast next morning, a dilapidated little group of aspirants had collected in the compound. The memsahib quickly weeded out those that were obviously hopeless, and the remaining candidates stood in a row before her, apparently without rivalry, simultaneously salaaming at intervals.

They were only three in number, and did not seem very promising. One was an old Mahommedan who had been, he said, a sahib's servant before the Mutiny, and had seen the entire family perish at the time of the "great trouble," but the name of his master he had forgotten. Ever since then he had been employed as coolie on various works, so that the probability of his remembering his duties, even if he had ever known them, was remote. The second applicant was fairly young

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and looked intelligent, but presented himself solely on the ground that his grandfather had been punkah-puller in the service of sahibs, though he, personally, had never been inside an English bungalow; this he cheerfully admitted, evidently considering it to be no drawback. The third was a low-caste Hindu of middle age, short and spare, with eyes that squinted slightly, and a badly pock-marked skin. His appearance was not encouraging, but he declared he had served in the family of a missionary, and he produced a testimonial written two years back which set forth that "Bahadur" was a good servant, though an idolater, and that his employer had only dismissed him because the man appeared to be suffering from small-pox.

Mrs. Baxter suppressed a smile as she handed this document back to its owner, who proceeded to explain that for a year after his recovery from small-pox he had been almost blind, and had stayed at his home which was in the village beyond the embankment. Then the new canal had been started, and, having regained his health and sight, he had carried earth and dug soil with the rest of his neighbours and relatives, meaning, when he should have saved enough money, to go out and seek service again as a bearer.

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This individual Mrs. Baxter retained, though with some misgivings, for Mr. Thorne's inspection; and the new assistant subsequently engaged him, without comment or investigation, to be his bearer until the more experienced relative of the Baxters' headman should arrive.

But "Bahadur" narrowly escaped dismissal on the very first evening of his new appointment. While the Baxters were changing for dinner they heard Mr. Thorne angrily shouting at his servant; then came the frightened scurry of bare feet backwards and forwards to the living tent, followed by anxious explanations and excuses from the native. Afterwards, in answer to their inquiries, Thorne told them that his cane was lost—the little silver-mounted riding-cane.

"I had it this afternoon," he said, "the beggar must know where it is. I've told him he can clear out if it isn't found to-night."

"But why should he steal it?" said Mrs. Baxter. "It isn't of any value."

He shot an angry glance at her. "Whether he's stolen it or not he's got to find it, and he knows that!" he said, rather rudely.

However, after dinner, to the visible relief of the agitated Bahadur, the cane was discovered by

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Mr. Baxter beneath some papers on the office-table, and Thorne, unashamed, departed to his tent for the night.

"Surly young devil!" said Baxter disgustedly; "he has no manners at all; never a word of apology after making all that disturbance about his beastly cane, and he never even thanked you for the trouble you took about getting him a servant! He won't be any use; he can't control his annoyance at being sent out here from headquarters, and I expect he has a savage suspicion as to why it was done."

Mrs. Baxter was inclined to be more lenient. "Poor boy," she said, "he feels flat and miserable and angry with us all. Perhaps he'll talk to me sooner or later, and tell me about 'her,' and then he'll feel better. I'm sure he's clever; look at the shape of his head, and the way his eyes are set. It would be a thousand pities if the memory of that woman were allowed to spoil his life. Give him every chance, James!"

And a week later Baxter was forced, grudgingly, to admit that, though Thorne was not a genial companion, he certainly had brains and ability—that he understood what was required of him, and did it with no lack of energy or intelligence.

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"The only thing against him from an official point of view," he said to his wife, "is that he manages to get the wrong side of the coolies in some mysterious way. I dislike the fellow myself, but I don't know why they should! Now, there's young Jackson, with five hundred of them out on his bridge, and they all love him. He chaffs them in his bad Hindustani, takes an interest in their doings, and though he can be severe when it's necessary he's never unjust, which is exactly what appeals to ignorant people. And then Thorne, who can speak the language well when he speaks at all, has a bother to get them to do anything!"

A day or two later there was a disturbance on the works. Thorne, it appeared, had shaken his stick at a young coolie, who had fled shrieking in a paroxysm of fear that was out of all proportion to the circumstances, and the panic had spread until more than a hundred skinny brown figures were to be seen streaming across the plain towards the village. It was some hours before they could be induced to return to their work, and the alarm that had begun to infect the rest was not allayed without considerable trouble. Thorne regretted the inconvenience caused by his action, but was unrepentant over the action itself.

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"The fellow deserved a licking," he said that night at dinner, when Baxter re-opened the subject; "he's the most troublesome coolie on the work. A nasty fat brute, nearly pitch-black, and as lazy as they make 'em. For some days past I've noticed him behaving queerly, getting round to the back of me, and whispering with the others; so to-day, when he deliberately left his work directly he saw me, I showed him my cane, and off he rushed yelling like a fiend on purpose, though he must have known I wasn't going to touch him."

The young man's discontented face grew darker, and he pushed his plate from him with impatience.

"You know, you've got to be careful," said Baxter judicially; "coolies are notoriously difficult to handle, and the least thing, whether real or imaginary, may make them all bolt. They aren't far removed from animals, and if they get frightened for any reason, however preposterous, you can do nothing with them. They're the most superstitious fools in creation, and you can never tell what they've got into their heads. Perhaps you'd hardly credit it, but whenever a new work has to be started it's often a most difficult job to get labour at the beginning, especially out in the

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country like this, because they still believe that one of them will be required as a sacrifice to ensure the prosperity of the undertaking. In the old pre-English days it was always done. Under any native building of importance you'd be pretty sure to find the skeleton of a man who'd been bricked up alive in the foundations; and if they dug a tank they bled some wretched brute to death in it, believing that it wouldn't remain full without the sacrifice! They're a particularly timid, suspicious lot of folk about here, where there are no railways and little communication, and they'd hardly ever seen a white face before we began operations. You must take that into consideration, my boy, and be careful."

Thorne grunted a taciturn acquiescence, and relapsed into his customary silence. Mrs. Baxter looked at him with attention; he seemed more gloomy than usual that evening, though not, she felt sure, as a consequence of the commotion on the work! She was keenly interested in this curious youth, in his unboyish reserve, his disgust with fate, his cleverness, which seemed unaffected by his grievances, and the defiant manner in which he endured, without attempting to conciliate, the circumstances. Also she felt a human curiosity as

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to his "entanglement," and longed for his confidence. But Basil Thorne, unlike most of the young men who had been committed to her charge, was apparently unmoved by her good feeling towards him; he never sought her society, or asked her advice, or even seemed to recognise her presence beyond observing the ordinary rules of politeness. Mrs. Baxter was neither hurt nor annoyed—she was merely regretful and interested; and when the breakdown of the boy's reserve did come she was as unprepared for it as he was himself.

There had been another mysterious panic amongst the coolies, and a number of them had deserted without any apparent reason. These defaulters, it was true, were nearly all youths whose services were not particularly valuable, but at the same time the restlessness was spreading, and there was a nervous tension in the atmosphere. Baxter was puzzled. His underlings either could not or would not give him any clue to the cause of the trouble, but all looked uneasy, and the Executive Engineer himself felt worried and suspicious. His assistant remained exasperatingly indifferent; he did his work admirably, but without interest or enthusiasm, and the question of the unrest among the coolies

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evidently did not disturb him. He seemed far more concerned over the delinquencies of his servant Bahadur, who, he complained, was never on the spot when wanted, and appeared to spend the whole of his time in the village, or gossiping with his old friends on the work, instead of attending to his duties. But on this point relief was at hand, for after weeks of excuses and delays, and a substantial advance of wages, the experienced bearer engaged by the Baxters' man had actually started on his journey. He arrived in the camp late one evening, whereupon Bahadur was at once dismissed by his sorely tried master.

That night, when Mrs. Baxter was crossing to her bedroom tent, leaving James poring over his office-table, she saw the figure of the assistant pacing up and down in the moonlight, his hands in his pockets, his head pushed moodily forward, and distress in his every movement. No one else was in sight. The group of tents showed ghost-like in the weird light that was misty with wood smoke from the servants' quarters, the coarse yellow grass that covered the ground looked colourless and unreal; behind gloomed a few dense mango trees, beneath which the horses stamped and snorted, secured with head- and heel-ropes for the night;

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and only the low murmur of voices, occasional coughing from the kitchen tent, and the distant howling of jackals away over the plain, broke the cold stillness. Mrs. Baxter hesitated; then moved forward.

"Mr. Thorne?" she said softly.

He halted abruptly, and stood still as she approached him.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked. Her homely little face and kind grey eyes looked up at him in the moonlight with persuasive interrogation.

"I am awfully put out," he said, after a pause, and as though the words came from him with reluctance. "I believe that man I have just sent away, that Bahadur, has taken my little cane. I can't find it."

For the moment Mrs. Baxter mentally queried whether his brain were affected. "He is crazy on the subject of that stick!" she thought.

"Your cane?" she said; "but you know you lost it before—the day after you came here, and you found it all right. It is sure to be somewhere about."

Suddenly she had an inward vision of Thorne sitting grim and silent in the big tent with the silly little cane clutched in the strong brown hands, and she remembered her passing wonderment that

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he should prefer to use such an incongruous toy instead of the ordinary masculine crop, or bamboo stick.

"Yes," he answered, "the little silver-mounted cane I always carry when I'm out—it isn't valuable, as you said when I lost it before,"—this with a slight sneer—"but I prized it more than if it had been made of gold and diamonds. It was in my tent, on my table, when I paid Bahadur his wages before I went in to dinner, and when I came back to go to bed it was not there. The brute knew I valued it from the first day he came, when it was lost and I made such a fuss, and he probably thought it must be worth stealing. The new man says he never even saw it; we hunted everywhere, but it's not in the tent now."

All at once Mrs. Baxter guessed the secret of its value. "It was given to you by somebody?" she asked, with sympathy in her voice.

For a moment he turned away from her; then, as if on an impulse, he wheeled round and laid his hand on her arm.

"It belonged to the woman I love—I have nothing else to remind me of her—no picture, no little personal remembrance. I have no right to anything of hers, I have no right even to love her."

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His grasp tightened above her elbow—"Why—why should a man be allowed no choice as to where he gives his love? Why should I be condemned to useless longing and regret to the end of my life—unless another man dies?"

"Mr. Thorne, of course I can guess what you mean, and believe me, I understand; but you are so young,"—she felt that the words were hopelessly trite—"you will live it down."

He loosed her arm and laughed, and his face in the moonlight looked old. Then she realised that this was no calf-love, no boyish infatuation, but a great passion that, young as he was, he might *not* live down. Her heart ached with regret for the pure strong love that was wasted, and with anger against the woman who had permitted this to happen.

"Will you tell me about—about your trouble?" she suggested. "I think you might feel it a comfort, and perhaps you would not regret giving me your confidence."

"I should like to tell you," he said simply. "I don't think she would mind, and you would understand. I'm not given to talking about myself, but, though you mayn't believe it, I have wanted to tell you ever since I first saw you! The impulse made me angry, and I fought against it." They

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began to pace up and down between the tents. The night was cold, but Mrs. Baxter was wrapped in a camel's hair shawl, and Thorne seemed unconscious of the temperature.

"I've known her ever since I went into the Secretariat, two years ago, and I think I loved her all the time, though I didn't know it, and such a thing never entered my head for months after we had first met. I suppose she isn't exactly pretty, though to me she is perfect; she is little and fair, and very gentle—like a child. She used to ask me to play tennis with her, and ride in the mornings, and all that sort of thing—her husband is much older than she is, and hasn't time for amusements; he's head of a department, and frightfully hard worked. He's a very good man, but I don't quite know why she married him; she was unhappy at home—her people were poor, and I think they persuaded her into it—anyway she said something one day, quite unconsciously of course, that made me know she didn't care for him, and I felt sorry for her—and that—that was the beginning——"

Mrs. Baxter repressed a rising exclamation of impatience. She saw it all. The little empty-minded woman, with her snare of youth and sweet-

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ness of manner, and the excuse of the loneliness that was her own fault; the cloaked baseness towards the man who had given her a life such as she had probably coveted—money, gaiety, freedom, even luxury; the unworthy trapping of the youth who could not fight her with her own weapons, who took such matters seriously, was no light lover of women, and therefore the more attractive and interesting.

Thorne was speaking again, and his listener controlled her imaginings.

"Then it went on, and we were a lot together—and I was miserable if only a day went by without my seeing her; she said she felt the same, but that of course it was all wrong, and we ought not to meet too often. She wouldn't let me write her notes or give her things, because, besides feeling it wasn't right, she said her husband might guess, and then her life would be worse than ever. Of course I would have taken her away and devoted my life to her gladly—and one night at a dance I lost my head and implored her to come—but she is so wise and so good—she put it all before me and made me understand how utterly hopeless it was. I have no money beyond my pay, though I would have worked for her anywhere and anyhow, and

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she has nothing. As she said, we should only cause trouble and misery and difficulty to other people—she never thinks of herself—and her one wish seemed to be that she should spare her husband pain; and then to think that he doesn't understand her—that he can't realise what an angel she is—" He clenched his fists and kicked viciously at the nearest tuft of grass. "When I got orders to come here I was in despair, because they are going home next month, and the days were so precious, but she said it was all for the best and that I should forget her, though she knows very well that I never shall! And I can't write to her, except now and then just in an ordinary way, because her husband might see her letters, and, as she says, there must be no risk—and I dream of her all night and remember her all day, and I have nothing of hers but the little cane she always used out riding—the little cane with her name engraved on the silver handle—Lilian, her name is Lilian—and now that has gone! I'm sure Bahadur took it, and I would rather he had stolen my watch and chain and every rupee I possess."

Mrs. Baxter felt powerless to comfort or advise. The boy's personality was too strong; he was too much in earnest to be taken otherwise than seriously,

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and yet the case was so pitifully common! To lay it before him as it appeared to her would be useless; equally so to urge him to forget his heartache in his work. As it was, he did his work so well; he was no ordinary stupid youth with his profession to learn and his character to form, which made the matter so much more regrettable.

"Listen," she said, holding out her little strong hand and laying it on his shoulder; "I am sorry for you, more sorry than I can say, but believe a woman who has seen something of life and of men —you may profit by this miserable business; it may give you strength, and grit, and teach you self-restraint. You cannot marry the woman you love, you cannot write to her as you would wish, nor see her without harming her life to no purpose. Therefore, for her sake, try to put it in the back of your life and be worthy of your great love for her, since, as you say, it is given to no man to choose where his love shall fall. Don't brood, or growse, or be morbid—take the inevitable like a man, and be thankful that you have done nothing to be ashamed of. As for the cane,"—the bathos brought an hysterical lump into her throat—"send for Bahadur to-morrow morning, and if he has taken it under some queer native misapprehension,

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bribe him to give it up. In this country rupees can work magic. Look, the moon is going down behind the mango trees, and I must go and drag my husband from his office-table. He works so hard, doesn't he ? "

" Yes, he does," said Thorne, with enthusaism ; " he is a chief worth having ! Thank you, Mrs. Baxter, you have been very good to me. I will try to remember what you said. I feel I must seem an awful fool, but you understand, and I'm glad you know ; it somehow makes it easier." He hesitated for a moment. " I say," he went on quickly, " would you—do you mind not telling your husband ? "

" I won't tell him," said Mrs. Baxter.

He pressed her fingers, and turned back into his tent ; and Mrs. Baxter proceeded to uproot James from his office-table and make him come to bed, though she herself, long after he was sleeping soundly, lay thinking of Basil Thorne's love story, which she knew could only be left with the years to finish. Consequently, when she awoke the next morning it was late, and James was already out on the work. He came back alone for breakfast, looking harassed and puzzled.

" What's the matter ? " said Mrs. Baxter at once.

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"Heaven knows!" he answered. "There's something queer going on, and I can't get to the bottom of it; the coolies are only pretending to work, I could see, and not a soul would answer any questions properly. Everything is practically at a standstill, and Thorne seems to have gone crazy, too, into the bargain—all about that wretched little cane of his, which has got lost again."

"Yes; he was very put out last night because he thought Bahadur had gone off with it," said Mrs. Baxter guardedly.

"And he was making the devil's own fuss this morning before we started, asking where Bahadur was; and on the works he kept making inquiries about the man. He's actually rushed off now to the village to hunt him up! He said I was to tell you not to wait breakfast for him. Let us have it in now; I'm starving."

The servants brought in the dishes and the meal was begun. Mrs. Baxter sat opposite the open entrance that framed the distant works running like a swollen, festering scar across the bare face of the country; as she sipped her tea she gazed out absently, thinking of young Thorne's confidential outburst of the previous evening, and she longed to tell her husband, but was loyal to her

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promise. She felt such compassion for the boy, so apprehensive for his future, hampered as he was by his morbidly tenacious nature.

Her husband also had been thinking as he ate his breakfast.

"By Jove!" he said suddenly, and stared at her across the table, "that might explain it all!"

"What would explain what all? James, don't be aggravating—you quite frightened me."

"Have you ever heard of the Momiai-walla sahib?"

"No—yes, I believe I have, but I've forgotten. Why? What about him?"

"Well, there's a popular belief amongst natives of the peasant and coolie class that Government sends out an official now and then to kidnap young men and boys, the fatter and blacker the better, in order to distil from their brains a wonderful medicine called Momiai which is supposed to heal all wounds and injuries. They think that the Momiai-walla sahib, as they call him, entices the victim away with a magic stick or rod, and then bores a hole in the top of his skull and hangs him up by the heels over a slow fire till the essence is distilled. It's quite possible that these fools here imagine Thorne to be a Momiai-walla sahib; and,

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if so, I don't doubt that Bahadur has been well paid to bring away the stick. Probably it was Bahadur who started the hare. The commotion Thorne made that first night when he thought his cane was lost, and the fact of its being rather different from the sort of thing sahibs usually carry, would be quite enough. If I'm right, Thorne may search the village through, but I don't suppose he'll ever see his precious cane again, or Bahadur either for that matter, I should say."

"Your theory certainly would account for the trouble among the coolies," said Mrs. Baxter thoughtfully. "But, James, supposing they really do believe he's the Momiai-walla sahib—isn't it rather serious?"

"Oh! I don't think anything will happen. If the stick is gone, and they find that none of them have disappeared mysteriously, they'll feel safe and settle down. All the same, I rather wish he hadn't gone off on that wild-goose chase into the village."

He rose and went to the entrance of the tent, and while he stood there, hesitating and uneasy, a curious sound floated over from the direction of the works—an indistinct, uneven noise that filled Mrs. Baxter with a vague fear. She had never heard the clamour of an angry multitude before.

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"Listen!" she said, pushing back her chair and joining her husband; "what is happening?"

But Baxter was already shouting for his pony. "I must be off," he said, coming back into the tent for his hat; "there's some row on, either at the works or in the village."

"O James, take care!" she cried involuntarily.

He smiled reassurance at her. "They won't touch me," he said confidently; "it's Thorne I'm thinking of."

As they stood together outside the tent, waiting with impatience for the pony to be ready, they saw a black and white patch moving over the drab-coloured ground with the speed of a greyhound—nearer, nearer, till it became the figure of a native with fluttering garments, head thrown back, and brown face paled to grey with fear.

"It's Bahadur!" said Mrs. Baxter.

The man fell at their feet. His turban rolled to one side, and his eyes squinted up through the shock of tangled black hair that was so released. Baxter dragged him up, dishevelled, half-delirious, but he fell again to the ground, a feeble heap of terror, sputtering out his words.

"Sahib—memsahib—pardon—pardon—they are

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mad—they are as wolves—they would neither hearken nor wait—deliver me not into the hands of the police—Ai! ai! they will slay him—and I would that I were dead——"

"Here is the pony," said Baxter quickly to his wife; "I must go. You question him."

He called a gaping peon who stood near. "Keep him in the camp till I come back," he ordered, pointing to Bahadur; and the next moment he was galloping across the blazing plain.

It was all so sudden that at first Mrs. Baxter felt bewildered. She saw Bahadur still lying on the ground and the peon standing over him. A trail of dust in the distance marked her husband's progress. Then she noticed that the curious clamouring noise had died away, and she also realised that she must find out what had happened. It would be impossible to wait, idle and in suspense, till James came back or sent news to her. She bade the peon bring his prisoner into the veranda of the tent, and to wait outside within call. When this was done she seated herself on the nearest chair.

"Bahadur," she said sharply.

He grovelled afresh. "Pardon—pardon—memsahib—intercede for this worthless one with the sahib—thou art my father and my mother—

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behold!—I neither ran away, nor hid, but fled in my fear to tell the sahib, who is also my father and my mother—permit me not to be hanged—have mercy!"

"If you tell me what you did, maybe I will speak to the sahib," she said quietly, but her heart beat with apprehension of what she should hear.

There followed a wild, disjointed story, through which the meaning gradually unfolded itself to the listening Englishwoman.

Bahadur had found it difficult to fill his stomach on a labourer's wages, and he, who had seen more of the world than his neighbours, had wearied of the coolie work; but he was in debt to the bunia, and could not free himself to get away, so when he heard that the new sahib required a servant, he rejoiced, for, though he knew that the post was but temporary, it would give him a little more money and a testimonial with which he might go forth again to seek service.

"But," he whined, "misfortune hath ever been my lot, even from my birth, by reason of the crookedness of mine eyes, and 'If an unlucky man become a cultivator his oxen die and there comes a drought.' When I applied for service with the junior sahib the day itself was unlucky, for did I

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not meet with a widow as I was on my way to the camp, and while the Presence was putting questions to me and to the others, did not a dog pass by and flap its ears and shake its head? True is it that the appointment became mine, but on the very first evening I incurred the wrath of the sahib through no fault of mine own, and now great evil has surely followed!"

Bahadur collapsed again, and rocked himself to and fro with incoherent mutterings.

"Go on," said Mrs. Baxter firmly, "what then?"

She waited with patience, and presently he continued, disconnectedly at first, then gaining clearness and cohesion, in a monotonous high-pitched tone, like that of a native reading aloud.

"When the sahib was so greatly angered because the stick was lost—the little brown stick with silver at the end that is not like the sticks of other sahibs—it came into my mind that perchance he was the Momiai-walla, he of whom we have been told from childhood, and I thought, 'That is the reason he hath been sent here by the Government, for there be many youths and boys among the coolies that are fat and black'—and I was afraid. Then I remembered what the padre-folk had told me—that such beliefs of our people are naught, and that the sahib-log are full of kindness and justice,

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and kill no one except in war and as punishment for murder. Nevertheless was I in doubt, and after some days I consulted with others on the work and gave them warning. They counselled me to watch the sahib's doings and to report on all I saw, and one night I looked through the flap of his tent and beheld him sitting on his bed, and in his hand he held the stick, and he was speaking to it, and doing obeisance to it as though it were some magic of the gods. Even then I knew not for certain in my heart whether he were truly the Momiai-walla sahib or no, but I went forth into the village and the coolie camps and whispered of what I had seen, and so it was said by all that the Momiai-walla was in our midst, and was even the new sahib who came each day to the works to choose those whom he required to make Momiai essence from their brains—the medicine that heals all hurt. The people were in great fear, and they said that I alone, being his bearer, could get possession of the magic stick and make them safe. This they besought me to do, many of them, gathered together in the night time, and each man promised me half an anna. Therefore I agreed to take the stick on the day that the new bearer came to the sahib, when I had received my wages and testimonial; and each man was to pay me half an

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anna, and in return I was to deliver them over the stick to be destroyed. I myself planned to pay the bunia in full and go forth with my riches into the world. Thus it happened—on the evening that the new bearer came and I had received my wages and a written recommendation, did I steal to the sahib's tent while he ate food in the big tent, and I took the stick from off the table and went with it to the home of my mother, who is old and bed-ridden, in the village, to await the money. I hid the stick, thrusting it into the thatch in the roof, till the money should be paid to me, for I know that the word of the dark people is not as the word of the sahib-log.

"I made ready my bedding, and clothes, and cooking-pots, in a bundle, that I might start at once on my journey, but still they came not and the night went by; nor had they come with the money when the dawn broke and the sahibs went out on the works. Maybe there was quarrelling amongst the coolies over the money—I know not; but later the junior sahib came to my village and sought me out in my mother's house and accused me of stealing his cane. I swore by Kali and all the gods that I had seen it not, and knew not where it lay. And then, as we stood and argued at the door, the sahib angry, and I in great

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fear, there came a noise as of many voices, and we beheld a multitude of coolies that ran towards the village from the works with sticks and stones in their hands, and crying out that the Momiai-walla sahib was even there in the village and must be destroyed. At once did I know that they would kill the sahib in their madness, and knowledge of the foolishness of what I had done came upon me. I besought the sahib to hide himself, saying I would give the stick up to the people and they would return contented without doing him any hurt; but the sahib did not understand, and when I moved to where I had hidden the stick he sprang after me and took it from me by force, and holding it as though it were a new-born babe he went forth into the village street. They met him there with the stick in his hand—there were hundreds of them, and they set upon him till he fell, though he fought like a young tiger—and I, knowing he must die, and fearing punishment and blame, ran to the sahib to be first with the tidings, and to prove that I had had no hand in the slaying . . ."

The man's voice grew hoarse, his throat seemed suddenly to dry up—excitement and terror had strained him to the uttermost, and he fell on his face unconscious.

Hours afterwards, when Baxter came back, he

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was alone. He walked silently into the tent, and his wife followed him. They stood facing one another, and twice the man tried to speak while his eyes told her how bad was the news.

"There was a riot," he said presently; "I am not sure yet exactly how it happened, but it seems it was as I suspected—in their infernal, superstitious ignorance they did think Thorne was the Momiai-walla, and this morning it came to a climax. They followed him to the village, nearly a thousand of them, and—and—my God! it's awful—they killed him, there in the village street. I was too late to save him——"

"Where—" faltered Mrs. Baxter, "where——"

He understood her. "The body is in the village now; it is safely guarded—and I think I've got most of the ringleaders under arrest—but I must go back again now, dear. I only came to tell you, there is such a lot to be done and seen to." He threw something down on the table. "I found that," he added huskily, and turned away, his hand to his throat.

It was the fragment of a broken, splintered cane, not more than two inches of the handle. Mrs. Baxter took it up, and, through her tears, she read the name "Lilian" engraved on the silver mount.

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THE RISE OF RAM DIN

It was in the year of the famine when my father, Ram Bux of Kansrao in the Mathura district, bade me make ready to go with him to the City of Kings —which is two days' journey by road from the village—that I might there obtain employment as dish-washer in the service of a sahib; for there were many of us in my father's house, and his crops had failed for want of rain, so that there was not enough food to fill our stomachs.

In his youth my father, Ram Bux, had himself served the Feringhees, and having heard him speak much of those days I felt that I should learn my duties with the greater ease; and as we journeyed through the dry, empty fields in the early morning time, he also told me many more things concerning the ways of the sahibs, which are not the ways of the dark people. I was but a stripling, and knew little of what happened beyond the village of my birth where I worked in the fields and tended the cattle until the day came of which I now speak; and I learned from my father that it is well to

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obey the orders of the master without thought or question, even when it might be hard to understand the reason of his wishes.

"Thou art somewhat of an owl," my father told me, "and not so sharp or clever as was I, who rose to be head-servant in my master's house. But thou hast enough sense to understand an order, and maybe with diligence and obedience thou mayest rise from dish-washer to table-servant, and from table-servant to khansamah, and then will it be easy with the bazaar accounts in thy keeping, and power in the establishment, to gather rupees till thou canst return to thy home a person of wealth and importance, even as I did."

"And what if the sahib beats me for no fault, as thou sayest will happen on occasions?"

"Take thy beating and say nothing. Above all things, do not run away. The Feringhees themselves are brave, though they are dogs and sons of dogs, and when they behold courage in others do they respect it. A beating does little harm. I lived once with a colonel-sahib who gave medicine as a punishment, and that was bad. There are certain sahibs who neither drink, nor beat, nor swear, but it is hard for a new-comer without recommendations or experience to obtain service

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with such, and the sahibs whom I served in the old days have now all died or gone back across the black water many years since. Thou must be content at first with what thou canst get; only remember this—obey orders without question, quarrel not with thy fellow-servants, and squander not thy wages in the bazaar."

I pondered over the wise words of my father and laid them up in my heart, and I resolved that I would rise, even as he had done, to be the head-servant of a sahib's household, that in time I might return to my village with riches and influence.

When we reached the city, we stayed for the night in the serai, and until dawn I could not sleep for the strange sights and sounds, and the crowd that came and went; never before had I seen so many men together. In the morning sunshine we went through the streets, and I stared at the glittering vessels in the brass-shops, at the display of sweetmeats, toys, and jewels, and the gay materials shown by the cloth-merchants. My father bought me a white muslin coat, a pair of calico trousers tight below the knee, and a new puggaree; and we took seats in an ekka and drove out to the part where the sahibs dwell beyond the city. Here it was all open space and broad roads,

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with trees of mango, teak, and tamarind, and the gardens were very beautiful. My father told me that, though the native city was wide and full of people, there were now but few sahibs, and no regiments at all; whereas he remembered that before the Mutiny there had been a large cantonment and many sepoys.

There was no service to be had at the house of the magistrate-sahib, or with the colonel-sahib of police, nor with the doctor-sahib, so we went to the bungalow of the engineer-sahib who looked after the roads and buildings of the district. There we heard that a dish-washer was needed, and the khansamah-jee said that if my father gave him a backsheesh, and I promised him a percentage of my pay, he could get me the place without any recommendation. He also said that the engineer-sahib was a good sahib, and the service to be desired, and that I should be well treated. So after some argument my father paid the khansamah, who was named Kullan, and I gave the promise. My father told me again to obey orders and answer not to abuse, and then he left me and went back to his village.

But after he had gone I learned from the bearer, who was also a follower of the Prophet, that no

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servant ever stayed long with the engineer-sahib. "For," he said, "the sahib is truly a devil, and when I am near him my fear of him is such that my liver melts. Sometimes for weeks will he be quiet, and then he will drink too much whisky, and for days we go in fear of our lives."

I felt angered that Kullan should have told my father naught of this, and though I said nothing I determined that, should the chance arise to do him an evil in return, I would remember how he had lied and taken my father's money, and bound me to give him percentage on my pay.

When I beheld my master I could well believe that what the bearer had told me was true, for the sahib had hair that was the colour of a polished copper cooking-vessel, and the flesh of his face was like unto raw meat; he ate his food with haste like a pariah dog, and looked about him as though he feared an enemy. Nevertheless, I stayed in his service, for was I not more or less in bondage to the khansamah-jee? And also for the first few weeks matters went well. The sahib sometimes beat and abused the other servants, but not badly, and me he never noticed. I took care to be diligent over my work, I learned the ways of the compound, Kullan taught me how to cook (for this

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spared him trouble when he wished to stay late in the bazaar), and I helped the bearer to brush the sahib's clothes and to keep the rooms tidy.

But the peace did not continue. The sahib began to drink much whisky, and one evening, when some matter displeased him during dinner, he sprang at the bearer, who was also table-servant, and smote him heavily, using words that burned mine ears as I sat in the pantry washing the dishes. The bearer cried out that he was hurt unto death; his puggaree came off, and the sahib kicked it through the open door and across the veranda into the bushes; then he shook the man as a dog will shake vermin, and all the time he smote and kicked him, and roared abuse.

For some hours afterwards the bearer lay in his outhouse groaning, and later in the night-time he rose and took his belongings and ran away without his arrears of wages or a written recommendation. Thus was the khansamah forced to do the bearer's work as well as his own, whereat he grumbled sorely; and my duties were doubled also, for I now helped to wait at table; and all the time I watched for a chance of letting the sahib see that I feared him not, for I remembered my father's words.

Two days later, when the sahib was sitting at

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breakfast eating but little and drinking whisky, the khansamah spilt some sauce on the tablecloth, and my knees shook as the sahib rose slowly from his seat, and, looking at Kullan with eyes like those of a tiger, walked towards him just as the striped-one approaches its victim. Kullan knelt and prayed for mercy, but the sahib dragged him over the floor till his coat came off in the sahib's hand, and he kicked the man along the ground like a game ball, driving him into the veranda. Kullan rose quickly, looking like a beast that is hunted, but before he could flee the sahib caught him and pushed him into the lamp-closet that led from the veranda, and locked the door. He laughed as he put the padlock key in his pocket, and heard Kullan khansamah crying and smiting at the door from the darkness within the go-down. When he turned and saw me looking, he shook his fist at me, and told me to go to my work.

Then the sahib went to his room and lay on the bed and slept, and I cleared away the breakfast and washed up everything; afterwards I went to the kitchen and found it empty; the servants' houses were also empty, and none answered to my call. They had all fled in fear, having doubtless heard the noise of the sahib's rage, and there was

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no one left save I, Ram Din the dish-washer, and Kullan the khansamah, who was crying and calling in the lamp go-down.

Towards sundown a telegram came for the sahib, and not without misgiving in my heart I took it to his room. He awoke and read the telegram, and then arose in haste, speaking of trouble concerning a bridge in the district, and bidding me pack his bag with clothes sufficient for a day and night, and order his trap to be got ready, and bring him whisky.

I packed the bag and brought the whisky, and I said: "Your Highness, there is no syce in the stables, they have all run away. But thy slave can harness the horse."

I went straightway, and with trouble and patience I put the horse to the cart and brought it to the door. The sahib did not beat me, though from want of knowledge I had done it badly, and when I told him there were no servants left at all he cursed their souls to hell, and bade me stay and take care of everything till he should return.

I asked him, "What are the orders concerning Kullan khansamah who is imprisoned within the lamp go-down?"

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He laughed, and the sound was like the cry of the hyena round the walls of the village at dusk. "The order is that he stay there till I return. Dost thou understand?"

I salaamed, and he drove away.

Then did my heart glow within me, for now had my time come, and the sahib should see that I was of use, and could obey. All that evening was I alone in the kitchen, and Kullan cried in the godown. I fed the horses and the fowls, and after locking up the house at night I took my bed and placed it in the veranda that I might guard against thieves. But I could not sleep by reason of the noise made by the khansamah, and I answered him not, for I feared he might persuade me to disobey orders and break open the padlock, and I remembered my father's words. Also did I rejoice that Kullan was in trouble, for had he not deceived my father and taken money under false pretences, and did he not exact percentage from my miserable pay as dish-washer? So I smiled when I heard him beating on the door and calling, and I only feared that when the sahib returned and let him out Kullan might kill me for heeding not his entreaties.

But the sahib did not return the next evening

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nor the next, and I was forced to move my bed from the front veranda to the back of the house on account of the howling of Kullan in the go-down. I slept the other side of the house, and I kept away from the front veranda, but still could I hear him wailing and calling, and I refrained from bursting open the padlock on the door because of the orders of the sahib.

On the fourth day the sahib had not returned; and the voice of Kullan was hoarse and faint. By the sixth day it was altogether silent, and I thought: "Now shall I rise to be chief servant, and I shall appoint and have dominion over the other servants; also now will the household accounts be in my hands, and I shall amass wealth."

When the sahib came back on the morning of the seventh day he looked weary, and as though he had suffered much care and anxiety; he took no notice of me nor did he ask me any questions. I led his horse and trap to the stables, I got his bath and laid out his clean clothes, and brought his breakfast. All the time he was deep in thought and was making figures with a pencil on a piece of paper. I wished to speak, and remind him about Kullan, but it was hard to attract his attention. I coughed and walked about the room, and moved

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the plates on the breakfast-table, and I took a fly-flap and killed flies with some noise.

At last, when the sahib began to light a big cheroot, I craved permission to speak, and he told me to say what I had to say quickly and not to disturb him.

"Sahib," I said, with humility, "concerning the matter of Kullan khansamah who is in the go-down, it is necessary to get out the lamp oil."

He stared at me maybe for one minute, and then he dropped his cheroot, and his red face became white as my clean muslin coat. He rose and pushed me aside, saying no word, and strode into the veranda, I following him. He searched for the key of the padlock in his pockets, but found it not: so he wrenched the chain from the wood-work of the door with great force, and the dead body of Kullan khansamah fell out of the go-down face downwards on the veranda floor.

Then the sahib caught me by the shoulder and shook me backwards and forwards, shouting in mine ear and calling me names, and his voice sounded as though his throat were filled with dust. He cried out that he had meant to return in a day and a night, but that the damage to the bridge had delayed him, and he had forgotten all about

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Kullan the khansamah. He cursed me for a fool because I had not broken open the padlock.

"Sahib," I said, and bowed my head before him, "the order was that Kullan should stay in the go-down until the day of thine honour's return. This slave did but obey thy commands."

Then the face of the sahib grew purple, and he choked and gasped, and fell at my feet with foam on his lips; and with much effort I got him into the house, and laid him on his bed.

Afterwards he was ill for many days; but no one, not even the doctor-sahib, or the nurse-mem who came to take care of him, ever knew what had happened, for before I fetched the doctor-sahib I pushed the body of Kullan khansamah back into the go-down and left it there till the night-time, when I buried it in a corner of the compound with all precaution.

There were none to witness the burial or to ask any question, for he was a down-country man, and I said in the bazaar that he had departed to his home.

While the sahib lay sick I made for him jelly, soup, and custard, for I had learned from Kullan how to cook. I took my turn in watching by his bedside, and when his health returned I told him privately of what I had done.

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For many years after this was I the sahib's head servant on thirty rupees a month, and he was as wax in the hands of his slave, Ram Din. I it was who had charge of the sahib's keys and kept his money. It was I appointed the other servants, and exacted percentage from their wages. It was I who made payments and gave the orders, and the sahib ever settled my accounts without argument. I had authority in the compound. I grew prosperous, and had a large stomach, and a watch and chain.

Now has the sahib retired from the service of the Government and has gone to England, and I, Ram Din, have bought land in mine own district and have married four wives and am a person of importance in the village.

So is it true what my father had told me: that by obeying orders and being fearless may a man rise in the service of the sahib people, and gain wealth and honour.

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THE EVIL EYE

In India there still survive dark corners where, in spite of ever-encroaching railways and the increasing facility of communication, the natives remain practically as primitive and unenlightened as they were many centuries back; where even such ordinary articles as matches, umbrellas, and spectacles are regarded as rare treasures, and where the long arm of the English Government has barely made itself felt beyond the prohibiting of infanticide, widow-burning, and human sacrifice. And prohibition does not always mean prevention, especially when a village is buried in jungle far from any line of rail, in an unprofitable, and therefore seldom visited district, and where the small communities have often to be left to govern themselves from one cold season to another.

Towards one of these collections of thatched hovels, which was surrounded by a scanty attempt at cultivation, and peopled by a jungle race of gypsy origin, a young English subaltern strode from the shadow of the forest, his gun under his

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arm, and his blue eyes eager with the desire for sport. For days he had been out shooting, on leave from his regiment, and had wandered aimlessly where inclination guided him. He revelled in the freedom, in the novelty of his surroundings, and in the exciting expectation of encountering big game—a hope that, fortunately perhaps for him, had not yet been fulfilled, seeing that he was without elephants, was not a first-class shot, and had learned little of the craft of the jungle.

He was new to the country, practically ignorant of the language, reckless of precautions such as the boiling of his drinking water and the milk he obtained from the villages; stayed out late in the sun wearing an inadequate hat, and pitched his tiny camp in feverish spots that the experienced would have avoided as Death itself. As yet his "blank days" had not daunted him, and his ambition blazed up afresh as he neared the village, for now he might hope to enlist the sympathies of the local shikari, or tracker, and prevail upon the man to give him news of game. So he rapidly skirted the meagre crops that lay between him and the mud walls, and entered the village high street.

Instantly there arose a violent commotion. The pariah dogs gathered into a snarling little pack,

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and lifted up their harsh voices in a deafening clamour. Children's shrill cries came from all directions, as they encouraged one another to advance within a safe distance to behold "the Feringhee." Women fluttered out of the dark, ill-smelling interiors of the low, thatched huts, the grinding of corn and polishing of brass vessels ceased abruptly, and soon a concourse of excited women and children lined the street, interspersed with a few decrepit patriarchs who were past work in the fields or jungle.

The young Englishman stood somewhat disconcerted by the sight, trying to summon his small stock of Hindustani to his aid.

"Where is the shikari?" he inquired.

There was a bashful, tittering silence, and it was not until he had repeated the question twice or three times that a little girl with an independent expression on her brown face, and a world of impudence in her upturned nose and black eyes, shrilly informed him that the shikari was out in the jungle at his work, as were all the other menfolk of the village.

"And what else should he be doing?" she concluded pertly, amidst a murmur of applause mingled with indulgent rebukes from the elder women.

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Then followed a suppressed giggling at the puzzled expression on the face of the Feringhee. This irritated the young soldier, who was not going to stand and be jeered at by a cheeky pack of native women and children, so, tucking his gun under his arm, he strode along the village street, closely followed by the pattering, whispering crowd, agape with awe-mingled curiosity.

He paid small attention to them, but looked to the right and left with faint but good-humoured interest, and noticed, with a tinge of regret, the squalor of the place, and the poverty-stricken appearance of the people. There was dirt, emaciation, want everywhere; faces sunken with jungle fever, limbs thin and bony, showing through ragged clothing; an air of oppression in the atmosphere; and the very children, though possessing the careless happiness of extreme youth, were undersized and ill-developed.

The little girl who had spoken to him, and who seemed bolder and more intelligent than her fellows, ran persistently at his side, her two stiff pig-tails of dusty hair standing out behind her head, her rag of a petticoat fluttering and swirling, and her blue glass bangles clinking on her skinny arms. The rest of her toilet consisted of a necklace of

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cowrie-shells strung on a dirty twist of red cotton—a powerful protective against witchcraft in any form.

"And hast thou slain aught with thy gun?" she inquired breathlessly, for the Englishman walked fast. "Maybe the wife of Laki, the shikari, could tell thee where the 'striped one' drinketh by night, or resteth by day. She is hiding there in the little house with the yellow pumpkins growing on the roof, and she will not come forth, for she feareth the Evil Eye. Her grandmother was stricken with the black leprosy from the Evil Eye of a Feringhee. But I will enter and ask her, if thou wilt?"

Innes caught the word "shikari" in the midst of the child's babble, and assumed that news of the kind he sought was to be obtained from the little dwelling at which she pointed. He nodded encouragement, and held up a silver coin that caused the voluble little girl to dart through the doorway of the hut in question, and Innes, in his ignorance, followed her.

Peering through the half light, he saw the face of a woman as far as age goes in native India, but of little more than a child according to European standards. It was round and soft, with a golden-brown skin, and eyes lustrous as those of a fawn,

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silky black hair, and tiny bow-like lips that parted in wonder and alarm at sight of the Englishman. He smiled at her reassuringly. She was really very pretty, he thought, and looked clean and fresh, so different from her neighbours. He hoped he should be able to coax some information from her, since the shikari himself was not at home.

But the woman paid no heed to the explanations poured forth by the little girl, and only fixed her gaze in silent dismay on the face of the stranger who had intruded into her dwelling.

"Salaam!" said Innes encouragingly; and then, wishing to please and flatter her, he stammered out a few complimentary words in broken Hindustani, followed up with an inquiry for the shikari.

But the soft little face blanched, the ends of the mouth went down, and with a cry of fear the woman darted into a corner of the hut, where she huddled in a shaking heap and covered her head with her wrapper.

This was clearly hopeless. With a slight laugh of exasperation Innes quitted the dwelling, and leaving the officious little girl happy with her undeserved reward, turned his back on the cluster of huts and followed a direction that would ultimately lead him back to his camp.

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Directly his departure was positive, a group assembled outside the shikari's house to discuss the event. The child who had played such an important part in the proceedings set herself to coax the weeping mistress of the hut to come forth and join the gathering, and at last Dhulia, aged sixteen, wife of Laki the handsome young trapper, and the mother of two yellow babies, reluctantly emerged from her seclusion and gave public expression to her feelings of terror and apprehension. The Feringhee, whom every one knew came of a race powerful in spells and demonology, had deliberately singled her out and noticed her above all the others, and who could tell what terrible trouble and misfortune might not result? He had openly commented upon her pleasing appearance—a proceeding avowedly so unlucky that its effect was to be dreaded quite as much as that of a curse—and Dhulia collapsed on to the ground and rocked herself despairingly to and fro.

"But," argued the little maid, who had caused all the disturbance by guiding the Feringhee to the shikari's hut, "truly the sahib came but to ask if thou knewest where the 'striped one' rested and drank."

She felt bound to exonerate the white man as

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far as possible, in consideration of the coin safely secreted in a corner of her petticoat. But the attempt was useless. Dhulia declared that nothing could explain away the fact of the sahib's unlucky words and looks. It was Fate. The only question now to be considered was how to avoid the ill-luck that was certainly hovering over her head.

"It will be with me even as it was with my grandmother the Kashmeri," wailed the fear-stricken little soul. "An Englishman cast on her the Evil Eye, and told her she was fair, and in three moons was she smitten with the black leprosy, as I may be also."

"But the curse did not continue," came an eager chorus from the bystanders, who knew the story well of how Dhulia's ancestress "paid the sacrifice," and averted the evil from her children by permitting herself to be buried alive.

Then suggestions were poured forth, remedies against the effects of the Evil Eye prescribed, and advice and consolation freely offered. Finally the question was brought before the village council that evening when the men had returned from their labours, the cattle had been safely tethered for the night, and every one had gathered beneath

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the large pipal tree that served as town hall, club, and general meeting-place.

The tree stood in an open space in the centre of the village, and a platform had been built around its mighty trunk; the roots were forcing up the masonry in places, and the spot had an untidy, dilapidated appearance, owing to the numerous bits of rag attached to the branches to propitiate the tree spirits, and the irregular group of rough stone idols that reposed tipsily against the trunk.

The consultation between the village priest, the head-man, and those in authority under them, terminated in the unanimous verdict that Dhulia was, without doubt, in grave danger of misfortune, and that a pilgrimage to the nearest sacred bathing-place was not only advisable, but absolutely necessary to free her from the spell of the Evil Eye. So the following day Laki borrowed money from the village usurer at exorbitant interest, and prevailed upon a good-natured neighbour to lend him a staggering, cow-hocked pony, upon which he placed his wife with one baby slung in her wrapper and the other astride on her hip.

For three days the anxious little family party journeyed along the jungle-paths till they reached a temple on the banks of the sacred river, and

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there, on payment of a fee that severely taxed the slender financial resources, Dhulia was dipped by a Brahmin in the holy Ganges, and pronounced free from evil influences and pure in body and spirit. She gasped when she touched the cold water, and choked and gurgled when it went up her nose and down her throat; she screamed and nearly lost her balance when a big fish flapped against her legs, and as she stumbled up the steps of the temple, when the ceremony was over, a piece of sharp stone cut the sole of her foot and made it bleed.

But these were mere trifles, and feeling relieved and light-hearted, and freed from the dread of misfortune, Dhulia gaily joined her patient family on the bank; and the little group sought a secluded spot where Dhulia could put on her clean clothes and spread her wet garments out to dry, and where they could cook and eat the simple mid-day meal. They chose the friendly shade of a tamarind tree, not far from a small wayside shrine, where squatted a holy being covered with dirt and ashes, to whom some pilgrims were paying their respects and presenting gifts of food and money. Following the worshippers came a leper—a miserable, disease-eaten object, who crawled in a blind, instinctive

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manner, whining always for alms, waving his fingerless stumps of hands, and drawing his blunted feet along the ground.

Dhulia, with the fate of her grandmother in her mind, and her heart filled with thankfulness for her own release from such a danger, took a copper that could ill be spared, and, approaching the wretched creature, handed him the coin with a few words of blessing,—and with the open cut on her foot she passed over the spot where the leper had rested his loathsome, oozing sores.

. . . . . .

A few months later Innes found himself again in sight of the mud walls of the little jungle village where unwittingly he had caused so much trouble, but this time he was accompanied by the Major of his regiment—a keen and experienced sportsman. The boy had carried back such glowing accounts of the district to the mess-table, having actually seen two tigers before he left the jungle, that the Major had felt constrained to explore the region for himself; so, waiting till the hot weather was established and the leave season at its height, he had started on the expedition, permitting the enthusiastic subaltern to be his companion.

The pair had had a long and unsuccessful beat

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that day with their two elephants, and in the cooling evening had strolled from their tents, coming unexpectedly upon the meagre village, at once recognised by Innes.

"Why, here's the place I told you about, where the women were such fools, and I could get no information out of them," he said, waving his hand over the parched ground towards the cluster of baking mud huts, and repeating the story of his experiences on the day in question.

"You'll never get on in the jungle if you can't understand the language," said the Major. "You're a lazy young beggar. I don't believe you're a bit better at Hindustani than you were six months ago."

"I don't believe I am," replied the youth gloomily. "It's an accursed tongue."

"No doubt. But still, if you want sport in this country, and also promotion, you must master the lingo. I found it a nuisance at first, but now I can jabber like a native." He paused as a succession of discordant yells smote on their ears; then he smiled. "I can understand every word that little beggar is screaming at her pigs, and she has a varied vocabulary."

A little girl, with a ragged petticoat and dusty

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pig-tails, had emerged from behind some tall clumps of grass a few yards from the two men, and was vociferously driving before her a herd of filthy village swine.

She ceased her flow of abuse as she caught sight of the Englishmen, and stood staring at them in evident alarm. Innes recognised her as the child who had guided him to the shikari's hut the day he had passed through the village. He called her to them, but she stood on one leg, trembling, and casting anxious glances, as though for help, towards the hovels.

"That's an old friend of mine," laughed Innes. "It was she who took me to the shikari's house. What is the little fool in such a funk about, I wonder? She was cheeky enough last time I was here. Ask her what's the matter, Major, and if we can get hold of the shikari."

"What dost thou fear?" inquired the elder man gently, in the child's own dialect.

She hesitated, and turned as though about to flee into the village, but the Major approached with a shining rupee held out in the palm of his hand, and repeated the question.

"I fear—I fear the Evil Eye," she faltered at last, casting covetous glances at the money. Then

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she looked furtively beyond the Major to where stood Innes. "Did not Dhulia, wife of Laki, the shikari, become a leper by reason of the words and looks of yonder sahib?"

"What's that she says about the shikari?" asked Innes, that being the only word he had caught of the child's speech.

But the Major did not answer. He had scented something unusual, and meant to hear the story. A few judicious questions presently drew it from the little chatterbox, who kept her eyes fixed on the rupee. Innes waited patiently, flicking his gaiters with his cane, serenely confident that his senior officer was extracting valuable information regarding tigers.

"And Dhulia bathed in the sacred water, as she was bidden by the council, and also did much 'pooja,'" continued the child. "But, after all, it was of no avail. The evil proved too strong."

"What happened?" inquired the Major with caution, putting the rupee into her little brown paw.

"She was smitten with the black leprosy, even as her grandmother the Kashmeri was smitten. And so she paid the sacrifice that the curse might not continue on her children."

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"What sacrifice?" asked the Major, producing another coin.

"They dug a hole beneath the pipal tree," said the little girl indifferently, "and Dhulia was buried within it. I saw her descend into the earth of her own free will, and she wept; but it was the only way in which to please the gods so that the babbas might not also be smitten with the evil. Dhulia cried, and cried, when the earth fell upon her, but she lay still, for she knew well that it had to be, and it was her own desire."

"Good God!" muttered the Major, and hastily tendered the second rupee, which the child grabbed from his hand.

He had heard before of natives afflicted with leprosy allowing themselves to be buried alive—in the firm belief that the sacrifice would stay the transmission to their families of the disease that is never regarded by them as the result of natural causes. He had scarcely believed, even with his close knowledge of the country, that such a thing could happen, but now here was proof of the terrible fact.

"Well?" said Innes eagerly, impatient of the other's silence. "What did she tell you? Anything useful?"

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The Major looked at the happy, careless blue eyes in the frank, boyish face, and decided to hold his tongue.

"Nothing," he said shortly. "And from what I could gather I think it's no use our staying about here any longer. We'll march at once."

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POWERS OF DARKNESS

THE train flew along, heedless, triumphant, driving through the clear morning sunshine of the English spring as we left behind us the rows of smoke-blackened houses, and their slits of back-yards littered with bottles, boxes, broken china, rusty cans, and squalor indescribable; also the subsequent suburb tapering off into a pathetically respectable line of little villas, some finished and inhabited, others still skeletons within scaffolding.

We had got into the real country, and now we swung swiftly through a fruitful landscape—villages, orchards, sparkling streams, and sloping woods tinted with the tender green of new-born leaves. Through the white smoke that writhed past the carriage-windows we caught flashes of purple heath, the gold of perfumed gorse, unmown meadows powdered with weed-flowers, hedges snowed with hawthorn blossom, cattle red and white in the pastures. It was all so soothing, so peaceful, so contentedly happy, and I had left India recently enough to take the keenest pleasure in the prospect,

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though, at the same time, I was craving for a pipe, and the compartment into which I had flung myself at the last moment was not labelled "Smoking."

I glanced tentatively at my neighbour, the only other occupant of the carriage, but perceived that she was clearly not the sort of person to encourage smoking, whether lawful or otherwise, in her presence. "Old Maid" was stamped legibly upon her person, from the ginger-coloured felt hat tilted over her nose, to the square-toed, heelless kid boots that protruded from beneath a brown skirt of some harsh material. She was afflicted with a troublesome throat cough which she made no effort to control, and she ignored my existence severely. Presently she drew off a pair of grey cotton gloves, opened a small basket shaped like a hand-bag, and ate a sandwich with care; then she drank what looked like toast-and-water from a medicine bottle, closed the basket neatly, resumed her gloves, and retired coughing behind a magazine with a blue-green cover.

The shape, the colour, and the design on the outside of this periodical seemed vaguely familiar to me. I gazed with curiosity, and saw that it was a missionary publication entitled *The Toiler*. The name called up with violence a memory that for

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years had been at rest, and in a moment I was back in India, standing heated, irritable, weary, on the platform of a little railway halting-place in the plains, with a copy of *The Toiler* in my hand. What followed now paraded itself through my mind as vividly as though it had only happened yesterday.

It was when I was still junior in the civil service, and had charge of a jungly district away from trains, thinly populated, unfertile, and horribly unhealthy. Naturally I escaped from it whenever I could, though I had to drive forty miles to the nearest railway station—the same little roadside halting-place—where mail trains up and down stopped only at long intervals in the twenty-four hours. I had wanted to catch the up-mail that morning in the height of a terrific hot-weather, when I was snatching ten days' privilege leave to the hills, but owing to a break-down on the road I had missed my train, and found myself at the station at four o'clock in the afternoon with a wait of three hours before me.

The situation was depressing. There was no waiting-room, no rest-house; the walls of the little white-washed building gave out a furnace heat, the masses of bougainvillia creeper that hung to

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them were gray with dust. The tall yellow grass, through which cut the railway line, rustled like paper in the hot wind, and though a water-carrier came and sprinkled the platform the drops dried even as they fell hissing to the ground. I looked about me with resigned despair. Baking in the hazy distance lay a mud village, behind it rose the spire of a little temple, and the round, heavy outline of a mango-grove. Otherwise there was nothing in sight but miles of dry, crackling grass the height of a man, stretching everywhere like a dreary, drab-coloured sea. A couple of melancholy coolies were squatting by the wall, a mangy pariah dog had curled itself up in the middle of the railway track, and over the whole squalid, desolate scene the sun poured with insufferable heat, scorching, blistering, blinding. I knew it must be two hours at the least before the fierce intensity would relax.

The station babu came out of his little ticket-office.

"Good day, sah!" he said pompously. His sleek black hair glistened with oil, his round face and fat limbs with perspiration; he was wrapped, toga-wise, in a white garment with a red border, and his arms and legs were bare. His feet were

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thrust into yellow leather slippers that clapped on the ground as he walked.

"This will be a long wait of nonconvenience," he continued with solicitude, as I returned his greeting, "here in such contemptible spot there is want of arrangement for traveller waiting, but they are not often. All the same 'when rain pours it falls'; yesterday two passengers have emerge, though not entirely of European peoples, still of Christian persuasions. They have depart in bullock vehicle of the country to one village afar off, and have discard a literature which, if sir would wish perusal, I can produce."

By this I gathered that some one had left in the station an English paper, or magazine, which the babu thoughtfully imagined might help me to pass the time; and as I had nothing with me to read I accepted the offer with gratitude. He shuffled back to the ticket-office, and brought out a copy of *The Toiler*—the first I had ever seen—which he presented with a low bow, and apologies for leaving me.

"It is recreation hours," he said solemnly, "and having absence of work at this time your obedient servant seeks benefit of seclusion under marital roof. But I shall kill a bird with two stones, and

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use all endeavour to cause pleasantness to yourself, sir, beforehand."

He hailed the water-carrier, and in Hindustani admonished him with babu arrogance to be extra lavish with the water; he summoned the two coolies and directed them to place a bench for me in comparative shade, and then he locked up the office and departed.

I opened my tiffin-basket and drank a bottle of soda-water, and then sat alternately fanning myself with *The Toiler*, and studying its pages. I read moving stories of converted ayahs, pathetic accounts of Hindu wives, youths, and maidens, persecuted and outcast for turning Christian, stirring descriptions of martyred missionaries, and of miracles wrought by prayer. Then my attention wandered; the heat was awful, and I began to think of apoplexy, sun-stroke, heart-failure, and recall instances of men dying in a few minutes from the heat even when surrounded with punkahs, ice, thermantidotes, and doctors. I made the "bhistie" pour water on my head, and sat with a wet towel bound about my temples, while the time dragged mercilessly, and the heat seemed to grow worse instead of slackening as the sunset hour came on.

At last the creaking of cart-wheels attracted me

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to the station entrance, thankful for a diversion of any nature, and I was surprised to see a woman in English dress and a large sun-hat climbing out of a clumsy country cart that was drawn by a couple of lean white bullocks. She was a respectable looking Eurasian—the type of tidy, middle-aged person, not very dark, who might be a teacher in a Government native school, or perhaps the wife of a prosperous subordinate. One sees many hundreds like her in India. But what arrested my notice was the expression on her face—her eyes were strained and wild, and full of terror. She hurried towards me.

"Oh! when does thee train goh?" she demanded in excited "chi-chi," looking about her as if in a panic.

I explained that the up-mail was due at seven o'clock, and the down-mail two hours later. Which did she want?

"The down—the down—oh! if only I could get away more quickly. It is only—what?—five o'clock now! and still four hours to wait!" She went past me on to the platform, wringing her hands. I followed, and inquired if she were ill, or if I could do anything to help her, but at first I got no coherent reply. Then I offered her

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whisky, which she refused, and soda-water, which she accepted after some argument and persuasion, and when she had drunk it she grew a little calmer.

"Now come and sit down in the shade," I urged, "and tell me what has happened to upset you like this."

She allowed me to guide her to the bench, and when she saw *The Toiler* on the ground she began to cry with noisy unrestraint.

"Oh! there is my *Toiler!*"—she stooped and picked up the paper—"we left it here yesterday—only yesterday. We were so well, and happee, and the Pastor was making Christian jokes and all. I can see him now giving this paper to the station babu, and he said: 'Read this, babu-ji, feast on it till we return; it will do you more good than all the curry, and dal-bat, and ghee!' Now here I have come back without him, and it was only yesterday—" She wailed again.

What a piteous figure she looked in her dusty black gown, her sun-hat, which was too large for her, pushed to the back of her head, the tears trickling down her brown face, and her dull dark eyes in their yellow settings still open wide with the memory of some recent horror. Something had

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frightened the woman almost to the verge of dementia.

I seated myself by her side and made a few patient inquiries; she appeared to accept my presence and my interest in her plight without question, and after a little while she began to talk more connectedly. In the tiny jungle railway station, amidst the heat and dust and dry crackling grass, I listened to a queer story told in the high-pitched, jerky accents of the Eurasian.

It seemed that her name was de Castro, "Emilee de Castro," and that she was a missionary. "I began by just being Bible-woman, and reading in the Zenanas," she said querulously; "but we have so few workers, and I was promoted to teacher in the villages, itinerating. We converted a whole village two years ago," — she shuddered — "the village I have just come from. It is many hours' journey from here by cart."

She pointed over the flat landscape, and turned her restless eyes towards me. I nodded.

"It is only a small jungle village," and she mentioned a place not in my district, "the people all gypsies and worshipping a low form of Kali." She shivered again. "They had been led into the right path by our efforts, they were repentant and

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ashamed of their idolatry, and they had promised our Evangelist they would no longer bow down to the graven image. But we have so few workers, and so much to do, and we were forced to leave them for a time to themselves. They could not be given more than their share of pastoral care, you see. This year there was nobody to spare but me and a native pastor; and we were so proud to be sent! He was a very good man, though black, of course, and so earnest,—and we went out there only yesterday, only yesterday, and now it seems years, not hours, ago."

She paused and looked over her shoulder nervously. "Did you hear a laugh?" she asked, and listened. I assured her that neither she nor I had heard a laugh, and, soothed, she went on with her story in a monotonous sing-song.

"We came here by train, and then got a cart from the nearest village, leaving at dawn with our Bibles and books, and a little tent for me. The pastor said he could sleep under a tree, or anywhere. We had a box, too, with some food and tea and cooking-vessels, and we knew we could get eggs and milk in the village. It was a very hot journey, but we were full of hope and trust, for we had orders to stay a week to preach and

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teach. But when we got to the village we found that all the good work had been undone by a wicked priest, that where our people had raised the altar of Christ there was now a heathen shrine, with a stone god. The priest was there looking, oh! so evil, with ashes rubbed on his face and body, and his hair hanging down like black snakes, and his eyes all red and fierce; and the people were worshipping, and sacrificing fowls, and offering money, and flowers, and food——"

Miss de Castro pressed her hand to her throat as though the remembrance sickened her, and again she glanced furtively over her shoulder. "Was there any one standing behind me?" she whispered.

"No one," I said steadily; "there is no one near us at all. Tell me, what did the villagers do when they saw you?"

"The people? Oh! they looked ashamed, but the priest was defiant and angry, and there was a great to-do. The pastor and I pleaded with the people, and asked them in sorrow why they had done this thing. They said they were offended with our God, because rain had not fallen on their crops at the right season, and they were in danger of famine. One woman cried out that a wild boar had attacked her husband when they were cutting

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grass in the jungle, and that though she had called on Christ He had not saved her man from death—and all sorts of foolish things like that. Therefore they had sent for this priest and built the altar to Kali. Then we prayed and preached and warned, we on the one side of the heathen shrine and the priest standing by on the other, scowling. The people listened, and at last some of them came up and told us they would return to Christianity and forego the idol; the rest slunk away to their houses without speaking, for they were afraid of the priest, who all the while said nothing—only looked. The pastor and I sang a hymn of praise, and we asked those that remained with us to destroy the shrine with the image upon it, but, seeing the priest standing there, they were reluctant. So the brave pastor went up and overthrew the idol, and pulled the sinful little altar all to pieces——"

She stopped suddenly, and threw up one arm before her face. "I did not touch it!" she screamed in a shrill, terrified voice; "I did not *touch* it!"

"Hush, hush," I said, with pity; "what is it that has frightened you so, poor thing? Try to tell me quietly—see, you are perfectly safe here,

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nobody can come near you without my knowing it."

She trembled, but grew reasonable again. "Yes, yes, I am foolish, but I cannot help it: you do not know; how can you, when you were not there? When the pastor destroyed the altar, at first the priest said nothing. Then he came near and held up his arms and cried that Kali would seek vengeance on us. His face was awful to see. But the pastor was not daunted; he said he did not fear Kali, and he called out in a loud voice that if Kali had the power she might prove it by killing him that very night! The people were frightened, but the priest laughed and said: 'Take care, Padre-şahib, remember that thou art a black man also, and that the gods of thy people are older than the gods of the Feringhees, and, maybe, as mighty in their own way!' But the pastor paid no heed, and we went about amongst the people and prayed with them and tried to give them faith and strength, for our time was short, and we knew it might be long before we could come to them again.

"We were astonished that the priest did not meddle; he just sat down under a tree and watched us, smiling, and saying nothing. Then we pitched the little tent and paid the cart man and let him

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go, for we knew we could hire another in the village to take us back to the station at the end of our week. We settled our things, and the pastor seemed tired, so I made him some tea, but he would not let me get milk or any supplies from the village in case there should be any attempt to poison us. So we arranged our meal somehow, and afterwards we sat on our campstools till it was dusk and sang hymns in Hindustani to the women and children that gathered round us, and all the time the priest was watching us. Darkness came, and he was still sitting under the tree a little distance from the tent, and when the moon rose I saw that he had not gone, but was there, quiet and not moving, just as if he was made of stone like his idol.

"I was very weary with the heat and the long day, and I needed sleep badly, but the pastor said he did not feel tired now, and he stayed up talking as though he did not wish me to leave him. He said: 'Look at that priest still there. I wish he would go away and not watch us. For hours he has never stirred, and I do not like it!' He seemed to get uneasy, and sat with his back to the priest; and he began asking me some queer things, such as, had I ever heard that the early Christians

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believed in devils? and he said the old idea was that the heathen idols really were gods, only bad gods—devils. Then he wanted to know what I thought was meant by Powers of Darkness in one of the hymns we had been singing. I said: 'Of course, Sin.' He said: 'Perhaps, but more likely the power of Evil,' and he looked behind him and began muttering.

"I suggested he should lie down and go to sleep, or we should not be rested for the next day's work, but he said: 'How can I sleep with that idolater sitting there staring at me?' and before I could answer he told me a tale of how a fakir had cursed three Englishmen for building a house on his piece of ground, and they had all died. I reproached him, and said I thought he had got fever or a touch of the sun to talk such nonsense, and with that I went into my tent, feeling annoyed. After I had said my prayers and laid down on my little camp-bed, I thought I had been perhaps un-Christian in my heart, so I got up and looked out to wish the pastor good-night. He was lying on the ground with a pillow, and his head was rolled up in a sheet native-fashion, so I did not disturb him. The moon was very bright, and I saw the priest still sitting: the ashes looked white on his face

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and chest, and his eyes were gleaming. Suddenly I felt afraid. I thought of what the pastor had said about Powers of Darkness, and I felt so alone and helpless, and although it was so hot I shivered. I held my Bible in my hand and prayed, and laid down again on my bed, but I could not sleep for the noises in the jungle so near, and the mosquitos, and knowing that the priest was there, awake and watching.

"I cannot tell how long time had passed when I thought I heard the pastor speaking. I got up and looked out. He was standing in the moonlight, his head was bare, and he was naked to the waist; and as I looked at him he called upon Kali in a loud voice and bowed himself three times to the earth. It was horrible—horrible—and what could I do? I put on some clothes quickly and ran to him. I cried: 'Pastor, what are you doing —you a Christian and all. What does it mean?' He turned to me, and his face looked gray in the moonlight as if he had rubbed it with ashes, like the priest. 'I know I am a Christian and a pastor,' he said; 'I know all that as well as you do. But also do I know that I am a native, and that the gods of my people have power, the Power of Darkness!' He bowed himself again towards where

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the priest was sitting, and cried: 'Kali! Kali! Kali!'

"I ran to get brandy, which we may use as medicine, for I was sure he was very ill, but when I tried to make him take it he pushed it away, and looking into my face told me to remember that I too had the blood of India in my veins (which is true, though there is only a little touch). I argued and prayed and wept, but he would not listen, and just as though he could not help it he moved towards where the priest sat, all the time bowing to the ground and saying prayers to Kali, the idol, in Hindustani. When he came before the priest he fell on his face and lay still. I ran to him and knelt by his side, and the priest got up and salaamed to me and laughed. He said: 'Hath Kali no power then?' and walked away into the jungle.

"I raised the pastor's head, I cried to him, I roused the villagers, and poured water on his face, and put brandy into his mouth, but it was no use. He was dead—he was dead—and I—I was afraid —I was afraid of the priest, and of Kali, and of the dead man. I was afraid of the Powers of Darkness—and I fled from the place as if I was mad. All the rest of the night I walked and

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walked along the rough cart-track, and when I had got miles away I rested in a village. I found the cart had also stopped there that brought us from the station, and when the man was ready to move on I came in it as quickly as it could take me. Now I shall have to go back to the Mission and tell them all, and what will they say? They will call me a coward because I left the pastor's body, and the tent, and all the things, and ran away in fear! But I cannot help it. I was afraid, and still I am afraid. Always shall I be afraid now, always shall I see that priest and hear him laugh, and feel the dread of Kali, the Powers of Darkness——"

The poor creature's words were lost in a scream, and she hid her face in her hands shuddering and sobbing convulsively. I did my best to quiet and comfort her, but her self-control was gone, and who can wonder? At last I persuaded her to raise her head, to drink a little more soda-water, to eat a biscuit, and finally to walk up and down the platform in the slackening sunshine, for the evening had begun, the dusty atmosphere was red with sunset, and a sense of release was everywhere.

The babu came back to his ticket-office just before my train was signalled. I took him on one

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side and bade him see to the comfort of the passenger who was waiting for the down-mail.

"She seems ill, babu," I said confidentially; "let her have your chair to sit on, will you?—till her train goes. I am giving her my pillow. Something has happened to frighten her, and she has left all her things behind."

The babu gazed at the limp figure on the bench.

"It is one of the passengers of yesterday, and she is Eurasian," he remarked without sympathy.

"Well, never mind that; do your best for her, and see her into the down-mail when it comes. My train's just due, and I don't want to lose it."

I mentioned, significantly, that the Traffic Superintendent of the railway was a friend of mine, and instantly the babu was ready to lie down and permit the despised Eurasian to walk over him if she so desired.

Then I went back to Miss de Castro, and ascertained that her return ticket was in her pocket and a little money also. "My train will be here soon," I added, "and you have only two hours to wait for yours, but I want to see that you are comfortable before I leave. Come and sit in the babu's chair, and he will look after you."

She followed me inertly, and I settled her in

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the clumsy, cane-bottomed chair, with my pillow at her back, and some biscuits and *The Toiler* in her lap. She murmured her gratitude, but still her eyes looked up at me strained with fear from a face that was ashen and drawn. It haunted me long after the train had carried me away into the dusk.

Throughout my journey I thought much of Miss de Castro, and of that which had happened in the jungle village. Then for a brief space the cool climate and distractions of a hill-station blotted her from my mind. I remembered her again when I returned to the heat and my work *viâ* the hideous little railway halting-place from which I had to drive to my headquarters. A few natives got out of the train, and straggled away towards the neighbouring village, and when the sound of their talk had ceased the place relapsed into its hot, desolate silence. There was the bench upon which I had sat and listened to Miss de Castro's extraordinary story, and behind it the dusty masses of bougainvillia hanging to the wall. The dry grass rustled and crackled, the mud village lay baking in the hazy distance, and presently the babu stood before me, salaaming, with a small bundle of tickets in his hand.

"I wish you happy return to-day," he began

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rapidly, "and have honour to report that death of missionary Eurasian female was none of the fault of your obedient servant——"

"Heavens, babu!" I interrupted, "what are you talking about?"

"It was not here that she breathed her last," he continued, in haste to exonerate himself from any possible blame. "I myself used all endeavour to keep up her pecker, supplying every assiduous attention, and she depart from here in the train living, but was expire at next station. Since then English religious ones have come here and go on journey into jungle. For the rest I am quite in camera, but lest your honour should think I fail in care towards Eurasian female, and make report to Traffic Superintendent, I have commit facts to paper——"

I waved away the coarse yellow sheets of office paper covered with copperplate handwriting, and questioned the babu closely. Yes; Miss de Castro had gone off by the down-mail alive, and at the next station she had been discovered in her compartment dead. A doctor travelling by the same train had taken charge of the body to its destination, the down-country station which was the headquarters of Miss de Castro's mission. More than

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this the babu did not know, and more than this I never heard myself.

Just as I was leaving the railway station in a dak-gharry, or post-chaise of the country, the babu ran after me and threw into my lap a paper in a blue-green cover.

"This was remainder of Eurasian female's presence!" he gasped; and the dust swallowed him up as the gharry whirled along the dry road.

It was the copy of *The Toiler*, and I flung it from me, for it could only recall the gray, stricken face and haunted eyes of the half-caste missionary woman, and her terrible story of the Powers of Darkness. What had killed those people? I speculated, as we rattled and bumped over the uneven ground; and Reason answered "Fear"—for I remembered that one of them had been a native and the other partly so, with instinctive belief in the Powers of Darkness handed down to them as heritage through countless generations.

The English landscape became hidden by engine-houses, trucks, and the paraphernalia of a large junction. The train slackened, and my companion gathered up her brown waterproof, her

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hand-bag-basket, and homely umbrella. She left the compartment without a glance in my direction.

"Pardon me," I called after her, as I too got out, "you have left something behind you;" for *The Toiler* lay on the carriage floor.

But she was gone; and I abandoned to its fate the blue-green paper that had called up such unpleasant memories.

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THE MUSK POD

ALL along the lower ranges of the Himalayas "the rains" were in possession, the monsoon clouds had wrapped themselves about the mountains, the landscape was smothered in damp rolls of thick white vapour. Throughout the day in one of the hill-stations the rain had battered on the houses with obdurate insistence, and now in the darkness of the night-time the downpour had intensified, till the roar and rush of the water from the hillsides sounded like the echo of continuous thunder.

Mr. Grey, widower, Bengal civilian, and head of a department, walked to the window and looked out at the wet blackness; his two guests had just made a polite attempt at departure, for it was late.

"You'd better wait a bit," he said; "this is too violent to go on much longer; in about half-an-hour's time I think you'll find it has worn itself out. At any rate, give it a chance."

Colonel Waylandson and young Darcy were easily persuaded. Apart from the discouraging weather both men were reluctant to say good-bye; they

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had dined well, the drawing-room was comforting with its deep chairs and lively wood-fire,—and Celia Grey was sitting under the lamp, the waves of her hair burnished by the light, her white arms and shoulders rosy-tinted by the warm colour of the silk shade, the blue of her eyes deepened almost to violet.

"Any addition to the museum, Miss Grey?" Waylandson put up his eyeglass and began a tour of inspection round the room. His keen face was seared and tanned by twenty years of India and the stress of active service, his close, crisp hair was almost white; but there was vigour and distinction in his bearing, and this, with his natural courtliness, kindly heart, and brave record, caused many women still to find him disturbingly attractive. Celia Grey was one of them, and her eyes followed the tall soldierly figure with unwilling tenderness.

"Yes," she answered; "I have got a fire-devil, a Buddhist rosary, and a tiger's lucky bones."

She was a girl whose mind was rather in advance of her years, and who gave serious attention to other matters beyond her appearance and her diversions, though she had a healthy regard for amusement and admiration. She was intelligently interested in the language and history of the country

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to which she had but lately come—in its people, its romance, its mystery; she had started a little collection of native curiosities, and already she owned various uncommon objects.

She displayed her latest treasures to Colonel Waylandson, who made fun of her antiquarian tendencies, and advised her to open a curiosity shop.

"Oh! you never take me seriously!" she said in laughing reproach, but behind the laughter there lurked a little resentful mortification; he always treated her as the daughter of his old friend Grey, as an attractive child to be indulged, petted, amused. To conceal this sudden renewal of her annoyance she turned away, and so missed the wistful shadow that clouded the Colonel's steady eyes.

She gave her attention to young Darcy, a handsome youth who, a month ago, had come up on leave from his regiment with the intention of pushing on into the hills beyond the line of heavy rainfall, to shoot ibex, gurul, and other mountain game; but he had met Celia Grey, and in consequence the expedition had been delayed from week to week. At the time of Darcy's arrival on the scene her heart was bitter with the mortifying discovery that she had fallen in love with a man

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who was apparently indifferent to her; she was furious with herself, furious with Waylandson, and ready to seek consolation in a revengeful flirtation. For the past three weeks she had allowed Darcy to follow her about, to dance, ride, walk with her; the homage of this impetuous boy with the frank eyes and fair head gave comfort to her wounded pride; with the result that she had raised the young man's feelings to a pinnacle of delirious, deluded happiness.

He was speaking to her now with eager interest, was anxious to examine the tiger's lucky bones, and promised her the claws of a leopard he had shot in the spring.

"Have you ever seen a musk-pod?" he asked. "You ought to have one for your collection. It's the little bag of perfume found in the musk-deer, and is valuable because musk is in demand all over the world."

"How could I get one? Are they to be bought?"

"Well, Krishna, my old bearer, who was a hill-shikari in his youth, says you hardly ever get a real musk-pod by buying from the native traders. They fake them up and sell bits of skin filled with anything, and a little musk rubbed on it to make it smell; even if you do get hold of the real thing

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the musk is often very bad from the way the trappers prepare it."

"Then you'll have to penetrate to the eternal snows, my boy," chaffed Colonel Waylandson, "and risk frost-bite, and starvation, and avalanches to get Miss Grey a real musk-pod!" Then he turned to answer a remark from Celia's father, whom he joined at the farther end of the room.

Darcy's cheeks flushed beneath the wholesome brown skin, he glanced at the elder men now engrossed in conversation, and he moved closer to the girl.

"I would risk anything to get you what you wanted!" he said, in a low, fervent voice.

Listening to the sound of Waylandson's voice as he talked to her father, Celia smiled at the young eager face so near her own, and absently she answered—

"I really believe you would!"

There came a lull in the roar of the rain, and a few gust-driven drops spattered sharply on the window-pane.

"There! you were right, Grey. It's stopping."

Waylandson crossed the room to bid his hostess good-night, and he noted the emotion in the boy's face, the softness in the girl's eyes, the sudden silence that had fallen between the pair; he suffered

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a sharp mental pang of regret which he tried to stifle as he pressed her hand to indicate his paternal sympathy with the situation.

Darcy wrung her fingers and gazed an adoring farewell. "You shall have a musk-pod," he said, and squared his jaw. "I shall be off at once, and in less than a fortnight I shall bring it back in triumph!"

She laughed gaily: "Oh, I don't believe in your shooting expeditions! Ever since you came up here you have been going out 'next week.' Why, you ought to have been over the hills and far away long ago, climbing about after goats and birds and deer. I expect your club quarters are much too comfortable!"

But two days later Darcy actually did set off for the farther hills with his wizened, Mongolian-faced old bearer, a string of unsavoury hill-coolies carrying his rifles, his tent, and the necessary provisions; and Celia was not altogether sorry. She was uncomfortably aware that she had not treated Darcy quite fairly, and hoped that the sport in which he delighted so keenly would replace her in his thoughts. She resolved that when he came back she would behave more honestly towards him.

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A fortnight later Colonel Waylandson sat writing in his club chambers; at intervals he paused and gazed thoughtfully at the white mist that seemed to press against his window-pane, while the steady, pattering thud of the raindrops resounded on the iron roof above his head.

There came a disturbance outside in the narrow veranda, and the Colonel put down his pen, impatient at the interruption, as his servant entered to say that some one wished to see him. "It is Darcy sahib's shikari bearer," added the man, "and he brings tidings that are bad."

Old Krishna came in, and his appearance startled Waylandson. His clothes were tattered, dishevelled, soaked; his yellow face was drawn with fatigue and grief; he threw himself at the Colonel's feet.

"The sahib fell," he wailed, "the sahib fell from a great height, and I, Krishna, his servant, who loved him as a father, saw this evil thing happen by the light of the moon, and his body struck the rocks till it was dashed into the waters of the river far below and swept away——"

Waylandson, shocked and bewildered, tried to make the old man rise and speak coherently, but he only continued his tragic news in a high, wailing

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voice, and the Colonel felt that it was better not to interrupt him.

"Until far into the next day did I search for him, climbing down the face of the khud" (precipice), "but I found him not, only did I recover the musk-deer that he had shot, which lost him his life, and I have brought the perfume-bag which the sahib so greatly desired, and the book in which he wrote during the evenings."

He fumbled in the folds of his soiled, ragged puggaree, and laid a heavily scented packet on the Colonel's knee. Then he rolled over on his side unconscious with sorrow and exhaustion, for he had walked day and night to reach the station.

Waylandson revived the old man with brandy and saw him comfortably housed in the servants' quarters, and then he went back to his table and opened the clumsy package. A little pouch of musk fell out—it had been wrapped in a piece of deerskin, and the strong suffocating perfume rose into the room; besides, there was a shabby diary, and Waylandson read the last few entries with smarting eyeballs.

"15th.—Got up into a deer forest near the snows to-day, and old Krishna says there must be

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any amount of musk-deer about if we can only come across them, but they are shy, solitary little beasts, and hide in the day-time, as they don't seem to like the sun. We found one or two places like a hare's 'form' which Krishna swears are made by the musk-deer. They scratch holes in the ground like a hill-pheasant, and he talked some rot about their killing and eating snakes. It's awfully difficult 'going' out here, and the khuds are ghastly. I've heard avalanches rolling and rumbling in the distance several times. If my first musk-deer has a decent pod I'll nip back with it to Celia like a shot, but I shan't return till I've got her what she wants.

"16th.—Saw a musk-deer this morning; a little brownish-grey beast with hindquarters that looked too big for his body, and two thin sort of tusks curving from his upper jaw. I suddenly came face to face with him, which took me so by surprise that I hadn't time to shoot before he was off—and at such a pace too! He must have covered sixty feet with each bound. I fired but missed him, and I feel awfully sick about it. Wonder what Celia is doing, wish I could write to her. Krishna pointed out a place as we were coming back to camp where he says the musk-deer

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meet in the moonlight to dance and play with each other, and he declared his father once saw them at it when he was a young man, but that very few people have ever been so privileged. I should fancy not, as a fellow would have to be a monkey or a musk-deer itself to get within a hundred yards of such a place—all crags and steep sharp ledges, and a precipice enough to turn one sick.

"17th.—Saw two musk-deer but couldn't get a decent shot; drove them on to a ridge which I thought nothing living could cross, but they just bounded on as if there was no law of gravitation, and though we followed them, crawling and climbing and hanging on by our eyelids, it was all no go. My elbows and knees are raw, but Celia shall have a pod if I stay here a month before I get one. Last night I couldn't sleep for thinking of her; it seems years since I saw her.

"18th.—Full moon to-night. I mean to go out to the 'playground' and see if I can't nab a deer either on its way there or coming back. If necessary I shall climb after them. I am not going to be done. Krishna wants to go back to the station, but I tell him we can't till we have got that pod. Awful row going on everywhere with falling rocks and hillsides slipping. I wish I had a better head

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for climbing, but I always was a fool at looking down a height. However, I feel sure I shall shoot a deer to-night, and then it will be well worth this fag and a lot more."

That was all. Colonel Waylandson closed the book, and wrapping it up with the fatal little pod that had cost Darcy his young life, he ordered his pony and put on his mackintosh. It must be his terrible task to take the melancholy news and the pathetic relics to the girl who had lost her lover.

He found her alone, sitting on the fender-stool in the drawing-room, reading, and she sprang up to greet him with a flush on her cheeks and gladness in her eyes. With all the gentle tenderness of a brave, strong man he told her what had happened, his heart aching for her sorrow as he sat purposely looking away from her; and after one sharp exclamation of horror she heard him in silence, the packet lying in her lap and the smell of musk floating around her.

Waylandson expected that she would leave him and take the parcel to her room, there to give way to her misery alone; but instead she opened it, her fingers shaking, and with set white lips she read the last words that Darcy would ever write.

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Then she drooped her head and began to cry with a quiet bitterness that was agony to Waylandson.

"My dear—my dear—what can I say that will give you the least comfort? I know—I saw—how you loved him—I can understand!"

She wrung her hands. "No!" she whispered, "you can't understand. I am crying—I am hating myself—not because I loved him, but because he was nothing to me—nothing!"

"Celia!" He feared that the shock had done her a mental harm, and he laid a firm strong hand on hers to quiet her.

His touch, his voice, the nearness of his presence, the tragedy of Darcy's death, the very smell of the musk in her lap, all combined to sweep away her self-control, and she sobbed wildly.

"I did not love him, but I let him think I might—I treated him shamefully, vilely. Oh! till I die I shall loathe the smell of musk!—and it was all because I was mad enough to love another man who cares nothing for me." Her voice rose and she stood upright; the book and the pod fell from her lap to the floor. "Go away!" she said violently, "now, at once—and never let me see you again."

Waylandson gazed at the excited, miserable girl, and slowly the blissful truth dawned upon his mind.

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He clasped his hands on her arms above her elbows, and forced her to meet his look.

"Celia, answer me," he said, "and give me, if you can, a happiness that I have never dared to dream of—was I the man you were mad enough to love?"

"Oh! why did you never know?" she cried, and clung to him.

"Little one, I am an old man compared with you," he answered, stroking her bright hair; "and for that reason I should have hidden my love to the end if this had not happened." He smiled into her face with devotion. "How could I have hoped that you would link your fresh young life with mine?"

"Then," she said, with a strangled sob, "that poor boy has given you to me! Perhaps—if he could know—he would forgive me, and be glad to think that he had sent me all I wanted?"

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"MOORE"

"SALAAM, sahib! Assuredly is there accommodation, and in twenty minutes shall there be dinner also. Chicken cutlets, banana fritters, cheese toast—but alas! neither whisky nor soda-water, though doubtless the Presence has both in the tiffin-basket? Enter, sahib, salaam!"

The old khansamah in charge of the dak-bungalow, or rest-house, stood a weird, fantastic figure in the dark veranda, lifting a hurricane lantern above his palsied head, his crumpled brown face and white turban haloed by the sickly rays. The Englishman who stepped from the darkness without, a darkness that was thick with the intense heat of an Indian hot-weather night, was reminded of dim Scriptural paintings by old masters.

Garrulous and servile, the old man turned and led the way, the lantern creaking as it swung from his hand, and by the uncertain light the Rev. Martin Moore, Chaplain to His Majesty's Forces, beheld the usual unattractive dak-bungalow interior.

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Bare whitewashed walls relieved only by the printed rules and tariff that hung, severely framed, over the mantelpiece; a blue and yellow drugget wrinkling over the gritty floor; a solid, sulky-looking table, and six strong chairs. In a corner of the room stood a wooden bedstead laced with dirty bands of webbing, a red punkah-frill hung motionless from the ceiling, and the thin, sharp "pinging" of mosquitoes arose with a vicious note as the light aroused them from their torpor. Moore felt his neck bitten before he was half-way across the room.

The young chaplain was wearied with many hours of travel in a vehicle resembling a Chinese palanquin on four wheels, drawn erratically by half-broken ponies that were changed with difficulty and danger every few miles. He was traversing a part of the country not yet opened up by the railway,—there are still many such tracts in India — and was on his way to the nearest junction from whence the train would take him to his destination. Only a week ago he had received his transfer orders to proceed from a small cantonment to an important military station, and this meant promotion, besides other advantages; but Moore was neither elated nor content. The move,

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though officially for the better, had come at the wrong time; he was overworked, had been suffering from fever, and knew that he needed a change to England. Now he would not be able to take his first furlough, as he had planned to do, when the rains broke.

He glanced about the discouraging little room, and wished vaguely that he were back in the "gharry," making uncomfortable progress along the grand trunk road; but the driver had elected that they should break the journey at a little civil station on the way, and in any case food and rest were necessary. The old khansamah produced a box of evil-smelling sulphur matches, and lighted a couple of kerosene oil lamps that stood ready filled on the mantelshelf.

"Send a punkah-coolie here," said the sahib, "and be as quick as you can with some dinner."

Then he sat down at the table, pushing the fair hair up from his wet forehead, and sighed with depression and fatigue. The heat was insufferable, and it must be hours before the dawn could bring comparative relief. A coolie came and pulled half-heartedly at the punkah. The squawking of fowls in the compound told that the "chicken cutlets" were in process of capture and death. He suddenly

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felt disinclined for food, and when at last the dinner was brought, hastily cooked, uninvitingly served, he sent it away almost untouched, and contented himself with biscuits and soda-water from his tiffin-basket.

The old khansamah was much concerned. "'The fowl hath lost its life, and the eater is not satisfied!'" he quoted captiously. "Is not the cooking right? For thirty years was I in the service of a Judge sahib, and there was no complaint. True, there is little choice, but it is seldom that a dinner is required. Few travellers pass through this place to stay at the dak-bungalow—they go to the houses of the sahibs in the station, which is bad for this humble slave who receives miserable pay and little percentage on what he provides."

Moore nodded without speaking, and the old man wandered on: "The last visitor was altogether evil, and caused much trouble and difficulty to everybody. Would the sahib like to hear what happened in the inner room—the little side room which is only used during the cold weather, there being no punkah hung within it?"

The sahib was not interested. He wished neither to listen nor to talk, but being of a courteous nature he said that since he now desired to sleep he should

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prefer to hear of his troublesome predecessor in the morning. At present he would like the table moved and the bed placed under the punkah. Moore had brought no servant with him, choosing rather to engage an entirely fresh staff on arrival at his new headquarters, so he and the old khansamah removed the table and spread out the bundle of bedding, after first taking the precaution of sprinkling the bed thickly with insect powder. The punkah-coolie was adjured to pull his best till he should be relieved at his post by a colleague who was at present snoring in a corner of the veranda, the khansamah salaamed his good-nights, and Martin Moore lowered the lights, undressed, and laid himself down.

At first he slept, though unsoundly and with restless movements; then the punkah stopped. The suffocating heat awoke him, and as he sat up in bed and shouted at the coolie he rubbed his insteps and ankles, that were already swollen with the bites of mosquitoes. The punkah was pulled again with more energy; Moore turned his pillow over, for it felt warm and damp, like a stale poultice; in the distance he heard one metallic stroke boom out on the hot night air, no doubt the hour-gong at the Court House. In three hours

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the dawn would perhaps bring a welcome, though brief, fall of temperature. He closed his eyes, but the next moment opened them wide, lifting his head, for somebody had spoken his name, "Moore!" and again after a short pause, "Moore!" in a thick, fluttering whisper.

"Who is it?" he asked aloud, and peered around the room by the dim light of the lowered lamps.

"Sahib?" came a hoarse response from the veranda, and the punkah was jerked more industriously by the coolie, who imagined he was being rebuked.

Moore felt relieved. Of course it was merely that the coolie had coughed, or muttered to himself, as they frequently will do, and it had sounded like his own name. Nevertheless he felt there had been something peculiar about the utterance, and he found that he was listening acutely as he tried to go to sleep.

When it came again, this time from another direction, he knew he had been expecting it—the same difficult, husky whisper, "Moore!" and after a few seconds, "Moore!"

"Yes?" he said quietly, for it was not the coolie who had spoken.

There was no answer. He waited, breathless,

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but heard nothing save the flap and creak of the punkah, and the tiny poisonous trumpeting of the mosquitoes as the hot draught blew them helplessly to and fro. Either the long journey and the heat had induced a touch of fever which was affecting his senses,—his pulse when he felt it was suspiciously rapid—or else there was somebody in the room with him. He rose from his bed and turned up the lamps on the mantelpiece. The room showed bare, hideous, uncomfortable, and empty of any living being save himself. Of that he made quite certain, looking unnecessarily beneath the bed, the table, and behind his luggage. There remained the door that led into the side room, and as he unfastened the bolts he remembered the old khansamah's chatter concerning it and the previous visitor who had "caused trouble and difficulty to every one." He pushed open the door, and held one of the lamps before him. The room was furnished with the familiar webbing bed, ricketty washhand-stand with enamelled iron jug and basin, a dressing-table with a looking-glass cracked and blotched, and one chair; he noticed that there was no drugget on the floor. The place smelt of musk-rat, and the heat was almost audible. At the further end of the room was a door that must lead into the bathroom; but the Padre had

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no wish to explore further; he was satisfied that there was no one in the room, and that the bath-room door was bolted on the inside.

Mr. Moore decided that the whisper had existed solely in his own brain, and he dosed himself with quinine and a draught of soda-water. Afterwards he laid down refreshed, trusting that he should sleep till morning, but the Court House gong sounded the next hour and the next, and still he was awake with a nervous, expectant wakefulness that throbbed in answer to every sound—the howl of a jackal, the shriek of the brain-fever bird, the occasional, unrestrained yawning of the punkah-coolies. But at least, he thought, the repetition, whether real or imaginary, of his own name had ceased, and almost simultaneously with the thought it came again, "Moore—Moore!" followed by a hasty, indistinct sentence, the words running one into the other as though forced with failing breath from a dry throat.

This time the chaplain did not answer. He lay rigid, assailed by a conviction that he was in the presence of something for which he had no name. The voice would come again, he was certain it would come again,—and it came. "Moore—Moore—" and then the muffled sentence. What was it trying to tell him? He put forth all his

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will power, he opened his mind to the reception of a communication from the unseen, he strove to emit sympathy, a desire to help, patience. There was a pause, it seemed endless, and he became conscious of an impression of extreme effort around him; a desperate, terrible struggle that was not of the body. Then slowly, rasping on the air, five distinct words were jerked from the silence, a harsh whisper of words that the waving of the punkah seemed to break and disperse even as they were spoken: "*Moore—Haselwood—Lea Road—Northall!*"

Moore sat upright. It was as though his senses had been restored by a splash of cold water. Now he knew that his brain had deluded him, and that his own name, with the prosaic address, had been no ghostly utterance. Northall was a large provincial town where his elder brother held a living, and whilst visiting there he must have seen "Haselwoods," "Laburnums," "Hollies," "Acacias," by the hundred, painted on the gates of the rows of little villas that spread from the town in every direction. Lea Road, no doubt, he had walked down at some time, without being conscious of the name of the locality; and it was all nothing but a case of subconscious memory stimulated by a high temperature.

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At the same time he dreaded a recurrence of the delusion. He did not like the thought of being laid up with fever in his present quarters, and to be fit for his journey to-morrow he must sleep.

Resolutely he closed his eyes, but mind and body were now hopelessly alert; sleep was no longer to be hoped for. The dawn would soon be breaking—he decided he would go out and watch it, and enjoy the half-hour of comparative coolness which is the only alleviation from the heat during the twenty-four hours at this season of the year. Already he could discern the outline of the coolie's figure through the transparent cane blind that hung before the doorway. The atmosphere was quivering with the curious reflection of light that comes with the first breath of morning; the khansamah's fowls were cackling noisily in the back premises, adding their voices to the notes of mynas, hoopoes, and doves.

Moore put on his slippers and went out into the veranda, clad only in his cotton sleeping-suit. A fresh perfume of grateful blossoms, like a scented sigh of relief, stole to meet him as he stood on the steps and surveyed by the increasing yellow light the flat, ugly spectacle of a tiny plains station. Straight white roads, square white bungalows in

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arid compounds, a few dusty trees, and grey-green cactus hedges; and, in the centre of all, the uncompromising Court of Justice with flat roof and severe outline, surrounded by groups of squatting natives, some of whom had been waiting there, regardless of time, for days.

The gharry stood in the dak-bungalow compound, the ponies were tethered beneath a tree, and the driver was seated on the ground busily washing his teeth. When he beheld the sahib he hastily crammed a disreputable turban on to his head and advanced towards the veranda with a sort of running salaam. Arrived at the steps the man declared himself to be consumed with fear of the sahib's wrath—the thing that had happened was altogether the work of the devil, but the Presence was his father and his mother and would perhaps forgive him, seeing that it was none of his fault that the red pony had cast a shoe which would delay the start by some two or three hours. The pony should be taken at once to the bazaar to be shod, and the gharry would then be ready to continue the journey; unless, indeed, the sahib should prefer to wait all day in the bungalow and travel in the cool of the evening?

Moore hastily crushed this suggestion. The

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delay could not be helped, but he had no intention of remaining in the bungalow a moment longer than he was obliged; it would be cooler, no doubt, than a gharry in the heat of the day, but he felt restlessly anxious to escape from the building; and once at the railway station there would be ice, and punkahs, and a cool, lofty waiting-room. Therefore he told the driver he would brave the heat, and go on directly the red pony was fit to start. Meanwhile he ordered some tea, which the khansamah brought in an enamelled iron tea-pot with cup to match; but the water was boiling, the goats' milk fresh and frothy, and the padre found it infinitely refreshing after his wakeful night. His bones ceased to ache, his head cleared, his skin relaxed, and he decided that he would dress and go for a walk while it was still cool, returning for a bath and breakfast afterwards.

A little later, in most unclerical flannels, he went through the scorched compound out on to the road along which he had rattled the previous evening. Opposite was a small, blue-washed bungalow, and, as he passed it by, he saw an English child come down the veranda steps—a little boy with a white face, pale flaxen hair, and large eyes, who mounted a diminutive pony and rode solemnly down the

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drive accompanied by an ayah, a bearer, and a groom. Poor little fellow, thought the chaplain, he should have been asleep in an English cot, in an English home, awaking to fresh country sounds, or the swish of the sea, instead of rising at cock-crow to traverse a dusty Indian road, pale and weary, returning with no appetite to a long day of imprisonment in darkened rooms, fretful and listless.

On beyond he passed another house, a large building with pillars, a portico, and an attempt at a flower garden. The inmates were having their early tea in the veranda, and a dog-cart awaited them under the porch. What a monotonous drive it would have to be!—only along the straight, unvarying road, perhaps through the bazaar with its stifling smells and display of rotting eatables in the low, dark shops; there would be no change of scenery, nothing to admire, and probably no purpose in view save to catch the short coolness of the early morning as refreshment after the long, hot night that was past, and in preparation for the long, hot day that was to come.

Moore walked on, thinking sadly of the thousands of English people who were living such lives in India, losing precious years of youth and health in

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such places as this, often dying in them, leaving their bones in the square burial-grounds that are always to be found on the outskirts of Indian stations, large or small. He came to the local cemetery ten minutes later; it stood back from the road, surrounded by a low mud wall, and shaded by a few large trees that now were blanched with dust. An English cemetery in a foreign country is always pathetically interesting, and he passed through the wooden gate to wander slowly among the irregular tombstones. Some were crudely new, others worn and crumbling with old dates, old names, and quaint epitaphs upon them. Here was one, a great box-like erection of stone, sacred to the memory of an officer of the Honourable East India Company's Service, "*who was much regretted by all who had the pleasure of his acquaintance.*" Beyond this, on a handsome monument surmounted by an urn, the inscription told of the demise of an entire family—father, mother, and three children—from cholera; and on a very dilapidated slab near by, these words only were legible: "*Killed by a tiger.*" The writing on an obelisk brought a pitying smile to the chaplain's lips; the date was more than a hundred years back, and after the name of Evelina Tallant,

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spinster, aged nineteen, was added, "*Died of extreme sensibility.*" To-day, he reflected, it would have been termed hysteria—but hardly on the unfortunate girl's tombstone. There were nameless graves, and others with their inscriptions hopelessly illegible. How many had found a resting-place here from the weary exile and cruel climate, and all so pitifully young!—but then the padre knew that few people grow old in India; they either die before their time, or go home.

He wandered on to a far corner of the enclosure till he reached a species of pagoda that covered the remains of a gentleman who, it was set forth, had been killed in 1805 "*in a duel with a brother officer*"; and behind this clumsy structure Moore found a new-made grave. Evidently there had been a recent death in the station—some luckless being who would never look upon an English meadow again. He was contemplating this long, narrow mound of colourless soil, cracked and rough, when footsteps sounded on the pathway, and an Englishman came round the corner of the pagoda dressed in cool flannels and a large pith hat, and having the confident, authoritative air of one accustomed to govern. He started slightly on seeing a stranger.

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"Oh! good morning," he said courteously. "Do you happen to have come here about this grave?"

The chaplain explained that he was merely passing through the station, and had come to the cemetery with no object but that of an early morning walk before he continued on his journey.

"I see. I just looked in to make sure this was all right"—he indicated the fresh grave-mound with his stick; "but the ground is too hard now, I think, for the jackals to do any mischief. When I saw you here I hoped you might be able to tell me something about the poor chap who lies under there. He turned up at the dak-bungalow last week in the most ghastly condition, his feet bare, his clothes in rags, and he was sodden with drink and disease—the worst type of loafer. It's beastly enough to see that sort of thing in England, but a white man like that out here seems so much worse."

"Yes, I know; I've had to deal with them. I'm a chaplain. Of course they are quite hopeless when they get to that stage, and it is better that they should die. Was there no clue to this poor fellow's identity?"

"None at all. He just staggered into the dak-bungalow, and the old khansamah couldn't get him

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out. Then he went and shut himself up in the side-room and proceeded to cut his throat! He was stone dead when we found him, and there was absolutely nothing to show us who the poor devil was. He was an Englishman all right, and there was something about his hands and appearance that made me think he had been something much better than the class that produces the usual loafer. But we haven't been able to trace where he came from, or where he was going, or anything about him. There wasn't a scrap of paper in his pockets, or a mark on his poor rags of clothes—only a little cross tattooed on his left wrist. We might advertise for information, but there doesn't seem much object in doing so. If he had any belongings I should think they'd much rather not know what he had sunk to; his history couldn't have been a pleasant one. Our doctor said he was rotten with drink, and must have had D.T. on him when he got here."

"H'm," said the padre thoughtfully; and the sound of a thick, harsh whisper came back to his mind, the whisper of his own name, and then a common little address. But he stifled the remembrance—such fantastic notions must be kept at bay; they meant fever, ill-health, sickness. The

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sun was growing very hot. He could feel it at the back of his neck, and it was causing him to think absurdly. He would go back to the shelter of the bungalow, and get off on his journey as soon as possible, away from this arid, dreadful little station, that was full of tragedy, weariness, and graves. . . . He suddenly noticed that the other man was regarding him with attention, and heard him saying, "Won't you come back to my house with me and have some breakfast?"

Moore took command of himself with an effort. "No, thank you very much," he said with forced steadiness, "but I have ordered my breakfast to be ready at the dak-bungalow when I get back, and I want to start as soon afterwards as possible, otherwise I should have been very glad"—he looked at his watch. "I must go now, I haven't over much time;" and the two men shook hands and parted.

The chaplain felt very feverish and heavy about the limbs as he walked back to the dak-bungalow. That curious whisper haunted his ears disagreeably; he could think of nothing but the wretched creature whose grave he had just seen, and he kept picturing the awful depths to which this fellow-being, who perhaps had been a man of his own class, must

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have fallen. He had known of men, well born, well educated, who had wrecked their prospects and destroyed their self-respect with drink and dissipation in India; one case in particular he remembered, for he had seen the man die. A young soldier, with money of his own, a good appointment, the friendship and confidence of the station—then debt and deeper disaster, until, despite the efforts of friends and relations, disgrace had followed. There was shameful imprisonment, ruin, despair, and the once smart, popular captain became a drunken loafer, wandering from station to station, sleeping in the bazaars, borrowing, begging, even stealing from European or native indiscriminately, till he had died miserably in a native hospital, and Moore had heard his last ravings against Fate and misfortune.

The man whose grave was fresh in the little cemetery here may have had just such another history, and the padre's kind heart was sad as he entered the bare little room that had seen such misery and despair; the very atmosphere seemed to him to be charged with bitterness.

All through breakfast the old khansamah babbled of the suicide, of the "*taklif*" (trouble) the affair had been, how the magistrate-sahib had ordered

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the side-room drugget to be burned, but how the sweeper had kept it, and it was in the man's hut now—a good drugget, which after all it would have been a pity to destroy. Moore checked the horrible reminiscences, saying he had already heard the whole story from a sahib in the cemetery that morning, and wished now to finish his breakfast undisturbed. The khansamah was reduced to an offended silence, but all the same he observed that the sahib did not eat the curry (composed of last night's chicken cutlets), nor the "bile egg," which the old man proudly asserted had been laid by one of his English fowls; instead the sahib drank many cups of tea with great thirst.

The chaplain knew by the ache in his bones that his temperature was rising; but he tried to ignore the unpleasant fact, and very soon he was once more inside the gharry, clattering along the grand trunk road towards the distant railway line, leaving the dismal little station with its tired people, its hot, bare compounds, its depressing dak-bungalow with the dreadful memories, far behind.

But, after all, the Rev. Martin Moore was unable to take up his new appointment, for he arrived at his destination helpless and almost unconscious.

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"Typhoid," pronounced the civil surgeon; and after long weeks of illness, weakness, weary convalescence, and slowly returning strength, sick leave was granted him, and he sailed for England, which, as the doctor said, he should have done months ago.

Consequently, before the autumn was over, Mr. Moore was being cossetted and nursed in his brother's home, and by his brother's wife, at Northall, where the keen air, wholesome English food, and complete change were quickly giving back to him his health and vigour. Now he was strong enough to go out with his brother on short parochial rounds, and was even preparing a lecture on India for the monthly Penny Reading.

One bright, clear afternoon the brothers were returning from a walk that had been rather longer than usual. They took a short cut, and passed down a road of "single-fronted" villas built of red brick, having a few square inches of garden in front of each hall door, and in most cases a pretentious name emblazoned on the gate. Martin Moore was reading these with amusement as he walked along the asphalt footpath: "Manville," "Cranleigh," "The Willows," "Waverley," "Haselwood"—he looked quickly up at a gas lamp, and

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saw printed on it in blue lettering "Lea Road." Instantly his mind flew back to a fusty, heat-laden little room in semi-darkness; he was listening to a hoarse, difficult whisper—"*Moore, Haselwood, Lea Road, Northall*": he could almost feel the slow wave of the punkah, hear the vicious ping of the mosquitoes, sense the weird, indefinite presence of something invisible that strove to speak with him.

With an effort he waved his hand down the trim, respectable little road. "Do you visit among these people?" he asked his brother.

"A few of them," said the vicar absently. He was interested in a little boy who was kicking an old golf-ball along the gutter.

"Who lives there—at the house calling itself Haselwood?"

"Haselwood? No. 7? Oh! only an old lady with a spinster daughter. They have a sad though very ordinary little history: the father led them an awful life, and finally drank himself to death, and the son went off to India as a kind of free-lance missionary and died out there. The name is the same as ours—Moore."

There was a silence. The vicar looked round at his brother. "What's wrong, old chap? Feel bad

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again? I've let you walk too far. I ought to have remembered—you look quite played out."

Martin laid his hand on the other's arm. "It's nothing much," he said, "but I'd like a rest. Take me in here, into the Moores' house, if you know them. I'd like it—I mean I like the look of it," he concluded rather incoherently.

"Of course, of course; come along. Old Mrs. Moore would be delighted. I'll tell her you've only lately recovered from a bad illness, and she'll give you her best chair, and a glass of wine, and anything you want. Buck up—you don't feel faint, do you?"

In a few minutes the two men were being politely welcomed by an old lady of a pattern to be met with by the hundred in every omnibus, every tram, every local railway. Her sandy hair, parted in the middle, was surmounted by a lace cap the shape of which recalled the outline of a lion couchant, with purple velvet loops for the mane; her eyes were pale and weak, her face a drab colour, her false teeth were loose and clumsy. She was dressed in black merino with a knitted shawl, and an agate brooch from which hung an old-fashioned gold chain; her manner was genteel without cheerfulness. The little drawing-room was nicely furnished,

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but it was seldom used, for Mrs. and Miss Moore preferred to sit in the dining-room when they were alone; there the table was so convenient for large work-baskets, the worn chairs were more comfortable, a homely odour of cooking pervaded the atmosphere, and the parrot in his cage by the window liked company.

"I have brought my brother in to see you, Mrs. Moore, for a few minutes' rest; he has been very ill, and I'm rather afraid I have over-walked him this afternoon."

Mrs. Moore was much concerned, and anxiously offered wine and refreshments, which were refused with tactful gratitude.

"He is home on sick leave from India," went on the vicar, "and I know that will interest you."

He looked up involuntarily at an enlarged photograph that hung on the wall—a young man in clerical dress standing in a self-conscious attitude by a table, with one finger inserted between the pages of, presumably, a Bible. It was a weak, nervous, unstable face, and gave evidence of the love of approbation that frequently goes with such a temperament.

The old lady sighed, and also glanced at the picture. "Ah, yes!" she said, "India—the land

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of the heathen, the grave of many a martyr to the Christian faith! Your brother is a clergyman too, I see"—she turned from the vicar to Martin; "may I ask if you are interested in mission work?"

"I am interested, certainly, Mrs. Moore," he said gently, "but I am not a missionary. My work lies among the English soldiers in India, and the English people. But I have seen the splendid work that is being done by the missionaries out there, and although our ways lie in different directions they will always have my sincere support and sympathy."

Just then Miss Moore came into the room, and introductions were repeated. She was exactly what her mother must have been at the age of thirty-five.

"Mr. Moore's brother is home from India," said her mother, and the daughter's sallow countenance brightened.

"We are always so interested in India," she said to Martin, "because of my dear brother who is gone from us. He went out as a missionary some years ago, after hearing a series of sermons on India by a great preacher. He had a little money of his own, and he did not join any particular mission, but just went out after he had taken orders,—and he gave his life for the cause."

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"How sad, but how splendid," murmured the army chaplain. "What—what happened to him?" he added diffidently, unwilling to pry into the family sorrow, yet impelled by an insistent curiosity.

The ladies sighed simultaneously.

"He went out so full of enthusiasm," said the daughter, "and he worked so hard. He travelled from one end of India to the other, preaching to the people, directly he had learnt the language. His letters were so full of his work and progress for the first two or three years, and then they grew shorter and less frequent, and he did not seem so hopeful. We could see that his health was breaking down, and we kept urging him to come home. Many times we saved up money and sent it out, begging him to use it for his passage, but he only used it in his Master's service—he would take nothing for himself. Then for a long time we never heard from him at all, and at last we got a letter that was evidently written when he was delirious with fever; such a heart-rending letter"—the pale eyes of mother and daughter filled with tears. "There was no address inside, and we could not read the post-mark. He was dying when he wrote it, there was no doubt about that, and he seemed to know it himself; he said he should never

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see us again, and we were not to grieve. We have never heard from him again; we wrote and wrote, but there was no answer, and we know he must be dead."

The chaplain sat silent. He was beset by an idea that seemed to paralyse his understanding—an idea preposterous and impossible, yet he could not shake his mind clear of it.

"Couldn't you — didn't you make any inquiries?" he said at last.

The two sad women shook their heads. "We did not know who to write to," they said, with the helpless ignorance of such limited lives. "We did not know where he was—you see he always moved about so much. We are sure he is dead or he would have written again, but at least we can feel that he died a noble death—and we are proud of him—we do not wish him back; he is safe now, and at rest after all his labours, his untiring work among the heathen. It was his zeal that killed him."

They raised adoring eyes to the picture. "He was always religious," said Mrs. Moore tearfully; "as a little boy I remember how he loved to go and hear the Salvationists, and how he would march up and down this road with a little banner

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in his hand singing hymns. He devoted himself to the Cross; it was his watchword, his talisman: he even had a little cross tattooed on his wrist—though I did not approve of that!" She smiled wanly.

Martin Moore sat motionless, though through his brain vivid pictures were passing swiftly. He saw the weak, emotional nature flinging itself out into the world without ballast or guidance; the taint, inherited from the father, gradually gaining hold upon a temperament and constitution ill able to withstand it in such a climate: the struggle, the despair, the downfall, and the knowledge that amendment was impossible. The last letter written as the waves closed over the man's head and he sank unknown and unaided, too vain as well as too much ashamed to seek some wise counsellor who might have given help; the degradation of those last years, and then the end of the shattered life in the stifling inner room of a little dak bungalow.

Again the chaplain seemed to hear the unearthly whisper—the name, the address. But why—why should the poor lost soul have wished to make it known to him? Surely not that the loving mother and sister should be told of their hero's shame, but

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rather perhaps that the miserable body might not lie entirely unknown and unnamed; or could it have been the man's last thought that had clung, echoing, about the scene of his death? Moore gazed dreamily at the commonplace, uninteresting little persons of the two women before him. Surely —surely their prayers, their faith, their belief in the goodness and martyrdom of their beloved, must have brought peace to the unhappy spirit sent out into the darkness by its body's will——

"Oh! Mr. Moore," cried the old lady to the vicar, with a scared look at Martin, "I am afraid your brother is feeling worse—we have talked too much; it has been too great a strain for him. Let me get a glass of wine——"

She fluttered from the room, anxious and agitated. Martin roused himself.

"I am all right now; it was nothing," he said; "only a sudden turn. You see I am still rather weak. Thank you, Mrs. Moore," he sipped the wine to please her. "Really I shall be quite able to walk back,"—for she was suggesting a bath-chair.

"I am afraid we tired you, talking about our sorrow," said Miss Moore humbly.

"No, no, please don't say that. I will come

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again if I may, and I hope you will tell me more about your brother's work and life."

So it was that the chaplain kept his own counsel. But afterwards, when he returned to India, well and strong, he took with him a small white marble cross with a date inscribed upon it and the single letter "M." The cross stands now over a grave in a little up-country station in India, behind a pagoda-like tomb at the far end of the cemetery.

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THE PUPIL

MRS. WARRENDER was wretched in England. Only two months ago she had arrived, a widow, from India, and London, under the circumstances, she found to be insupportable. It was so different from coming home for the summer as a "grass" widow, with a liberal allowance, beautiful costumes to display at Sandown, Hurlingham, Ranelagh—plenty of men friends on furlough to sit with her in the Park, drive her about in hansoms, take her to theatres, dinners, suppers. She loved smart crowds, gaiety, excitement, and chafed at being forced by convention to forego her favourite pastimes, and assume a grief she could not feel.

Her husband, a civilian many years her senior, head of his department, drawing huge pay, dividing the official year between Simla and Calcutta, had died suddenly, some said of overwork, others that his gay wife had broken his heart; and there was an end, for his widow, of the balls and race-meetings, the riding, tennis, entertaining and being enter-

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tained, the "dalliance and the wit, the flattery and the strife," of her life in India. It is a country that does not encourage widows who have no official belongings or particular reasons for remaining out there; and Mrs. Warrender well knew that not to hurry home under the new conditions would only place her in a false position, and lower her prestige in the eyes of Anglo-India.

So she had sailed for England, nominally in broken health, actually in a very bad temper, and had existed, under protest, in a furnished flat, till, she told her friends, she could stand it no longer, and meant to try the country. She discovered a glorified cottage on the outskirts of a remote village, and there she settled down to wait till she should be justified in emerging, as the brilliant butterfly she was, from her hampering chrysalis of mourning. When people inquired if she had any object in selecting that particular neighbourhood as the scene of her seclusion, she declared that she had none whatever; but, after her departure, those of her Anglo-Indian friends who were at home on leave ascertained that somewhere in the county there lived the near relatives of a certain Colonel Porteous, who might be expected to make his headquarters with the family on his return to

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England. Therefore Mrs. Warrender's Indian friends added two and two together.

"I wonder if he will marry her?" speculated one of these arithmeticians.

"I dare say," replied another; "but time will show, and it won't be a long time if *she* can help it! Do you recollect the state she was in when his regiment was ordered to South Africa from Calcutta last year? They haven't met since, but I suppose he knows she's a widow. I saw he had got leave, so he ought to be home soon."

Meanwhile Mrs. Warrender sat day after day at her cottage window, dreaming of the home-coming of this same Colonel Porteous. For reasons of precaution and policy she had never corresponded with him during her husband's lifetime, and now that she was free she shrank from being the first to open communications; for, in spite of all her shallowness and egoism, she really cared for the man. She felt confident from his silence that either he had not yet heard of her "loss," or else had applied for leave the moment the news had reached him, preferring to come direct to her in person instead of writing.

After much deliberation she wrote him a brief letter, boldly stating what had happened, and that

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she was to be found within twenty miles of his old home; this she sent to the care of his agents to meet him on his arrival in London. Then she gave herself over to happy imaginings. He would answer her letter first, and immediately afterwards he would come. They would be alone—no interruptions, nothing to fear. She would wear a long, clinging, black crêpe-de-chine gown that became her perfectly, and she would scatter over it some of the lilac scent he used to love. He had said, when they parted, that the scent of lilac would remind him of her to the end of his life.

One afternoon her dreams were suddenly checked by the arrival of a visitor—not Colonel Porteous, but the daughter of the vicar of the parish, a dark, sullen-looking girl, who had stared so fixedly at her the previous Sunday in church that Mrs. Warrender had felt quite uncomfortable. She rose reluctantly from her seat as the maid announced Miss Scott.

"How d'ye do?" said Mrs. Warrender politely, but without interest.

"Quite well, thank you; how are you?" was the unexpected reply, for it is the last question to which we anticipate any answer.

"Pretty well, thanks," murmured Mrs. Warrender,

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remembering she was a newly made widow, and drooped her golden head.

"I have come because I want to ask you something," said Miss Scott bluntly, "but I am afraid you will think me very impertinent and peculiar."

Mrs. Warrender regarded her visitor with some alarm, and vaguely recalled having heard that families buried away in the country intermarried until there was hardly a sane member remaining.

"I shall be very glad if I can help you in any way," she said doubtfully.

"Oh! thank you! When I saw you in church I knew your advice would be worth following if you would only give it to me; you looked so kind and charming."

"Good heavens!" thought Mrs. Warrender, "what has she been doing? Fallen in love with the gardener, perhaps."

She rose and rang the bell.

"You must have some tea," she said graciously, "and I will advise you if I can."

And after the Cashmere silver tea-tray, with the old Oriental china cups and saucers, had been brought in, and Miss Scott was comfortably settled with tea and cakes, Mrs. Warrender encouraged the girl to speak out.

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"Well, you see," said the vicar's daughter, "my mother died when I was a baby, and I have no brothers or sisters, only some cousins whom I have never seen. Now, these cousins have just come to live on the other side of the county, and they have asked me to go and stay with them. My father wants me to accept the invitation."

"And you don't wish to go?"

"Not as I am now. They are very fashionable people, and I am so ignorant of the world and how I ought to behave. We never see any one here except once a year at the flower show, and perhaps at a school treat. My father has taught me French, and Latin, and mathematics; but what is the use of that when in other ways I am all wrong, and unlike other girls? My clothes, I am sure, are terrible; my old nurse has made them for me ever since I was born—when I saw you I felt awful in them! Then the way my hair goes is so unbecoming—and to tell you the truth, Mrs. Warrender, I long to be fashionable, and I don't know how to manage it. I would give the world to be just like you!" concluded this ambitious damsel.

Mrs. Warrender stifled a smile of contemptuous amusement, while a spirit of mischief entered her

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breast. Here was an occupation—a diversion to while away the long hours. Miss Scott should astonish these cousins! And she laughed inwardly as she imagined the amazement of the relations on receiving an apparently smart, up-to-date young woman, instead of the expected dowdy, homely, country clergyman's daughter. But could such a miracle be accomplished?

"And you want me to give you some hints?" she said slowly. "When do you go on this visit?"

"In three weeks from now. Oh! can you—will you help me?"

"Perhaps I can, if you do as I tell you, and remember all I say."

"Indeed I will be the best pupil in the world. How good you are! Thank you a thousand times."

"Well, it's too late to begin to-day. Come to-morrow morning."

"But I have the infant school——"

Mrs. Warrender shrugged her shoulders.

"But it doesn't matter—I don't care—I will throw them over, and *come*."

"Very well. I shall expect you—bring your brush and comb with you," added Mrs. Warrender,

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as they shook hands, and Emily Scott stepped out into the balm of the summer evening.

. . . . . .

Three weeks later Mrs. Warrender surveyed her handiwork with pride and satisfaction as Emily sat in her drawing-room, no longer sullen, dowdy, and commonplace, but an exceedingly striking-looking girl. Her heavy masses of dark hair were gathered into an artistic knot on the nape of her neck, cleverly waved and curled, an achievement that had cost Miss Scott hours of weary effort and backache, not to speak of severe burns with hot tongs, but the science of which her perseverance had finally mastered. The thick black eyebrows had been coaxed into an arched line, and were distinctly effective over the deep brown eyes that were rendered more brilliant by the almost imperceptible "touch-up" in the corners. Her skin, formerly tanned and rough, had yielded wonderfully to creams and washes, and now, softened by powder and with the faintest enhancement of colour in the cheeks, produced a complexion that made even Mrs. Warrender sigh with envy.

That lady never did things by halves, and her clever French maid had been requisitioned to remodel scarcely worn gowns that had been laid

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aside at the time of Mrs. Warrender's bereavement, and which had been summoned from a London warehouse at the commencement of the transformation. Emily's rather massive figure was now encased in French corsets of the latest shape, and the graceful lines of the afternoon gown of dull red gave her height and distinction.

Emily had worked very hard, and earnestly striven to follow every hint, every idea that emanated from her teacher. Of course the infant school class, mothers' meetings, and cottage visiting had been obliged to suffer in proportion. She had learned to move slowly and gracefully about a room, to nestle easily into the cushions of an armchair or sofa, to casually display her foot (which was shapely) encased in dainty, open-work stockings and high-heeled shoes; to appreciate French novels and cigarettes, and had been quick to pick up the knack of small talk in which her model had given her lessons.

"I am proud of you!" said Mrs. Warrender, and Emily flushed with gratitude and triumph. "And now mind you write and describe to me the faces of your relations when first they behold you!"

"Of course. And how shall I ever—*ever* be able to thank you for all you have done for me?"

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Mrs. Warrender laughed a little constrainedly, and a look that Emily had never seen before came into her eyes.

"Perhaps," she said in a low voice, "I may have done you more harm than good. How will you like coming back here when your visit is over and there is no more excitement?"

"Oh! I hope I shall come back engaged to be married," was the calm reply. "I shall do my best if I meet any men. Don't you think I could make any average man fall in love with me now?"

"My dear girl, you are very cold-blooded!"

"Perhaps," laughed Emily. "But marriage is my only loophole of escape from a life of poverty and dulness."

"Then don't be too obviously anxious, and you had better not smoke or stick your feet out if you mean matrimony."

"I may have no chance—and then back I come to father's musty library, and old Elizabeth, and mothers' meetings and school-children for the rest of my days. Ugh!"

"Well—goodbye, and good luck to you," said Mrs. Warrender, as the girl rose to go; "you'll be off to-morrow long before I'm up. Wear the linen coat and skirt—and here's a bottle of my precious

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lilac scent for you. I shall expect a letter in about a week."

But at the end of a week there was nothing from Emily Scott, neither did the other letter arrive that Mrs. Warrender was daily expecting, though she had seen in the paper that Colonel Porteous had landed in England. Then, when a fortnight had slipped away, the following epistle reached her in Emily Scott's clear, man-like handwriting :—

"MY DEAR FAIRY GODMOTHER,—You will forgive my not having written before when you hear my wonderful news. I am engaged to be married, and it is all owing to you. He is a Colonel Porteous just home from South Africa, and I feel I can never repay you, for he certainly would not have looked at me twice if we had met five weeks ago, before you helped me! It all happened in no time, for his people live near here and are great friends of my cousins, which was partly what induced the latter to settle here. And now just think of it!—my real life has begun at last, and for me there will be no more village, no more school-children, no more dulness or poverty! I am so happy and triumphant and excited I can hardly write, but when I feel calmer and have grown a

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little more accustomed to my luck I will give you all details—and there are many! I wanted you to hear of it from me direct, and whatever happens I shall always remain your loving and grateful pupil, EMILY SCOTT.

"*P.S.*—You will be amused to hear that he tries to tease me by declaring that what first attracted him to me was the scent of lilac."

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THE SISTRUM

EVERY day at the same hour—2.30 P.M.—the single-horse landau hired by Miss Sarah Wayte drew up at the door of that lady's gloomy looking house in a monotonous Kensington Square; and simultaneously Miss Wayte's great-niece descended the dark staircase, carrying a rug, a cushion, and a reticule, and dragging by a string a discontented King Charles spaniel, who pattered reluctantly in her wake, his eyes goggling plaintively from his sleek round head.

Wet or fine, summer or winter, for the past five years had Lydia Wayte daily descended these stairs carrying the same burdens—five long weary years that had gradually taken the glint from her hair, the light from her eyes, and the colour from her cheeks. For Lydia was the patient and unhappy victim of the one charitable act of her Aunt Sarah's existence—*i.e.* the grudging bestowal of a home on the youngest of a large family of suddenly orphaned and impoverished relations.

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At the age of nineteen Lydia had found herself installed as the companion and slave of her exacting and exasperating old kinswoman, and embarked on a life consisting of a tedious round of monotonous duties. She read aloud uninteresting old-fashioned novels, in which all the "s's" looked like "f's"; she washed and combed Pip, the spaniel; she made and mended her own and her aunt's clothes; she kept the accounts and did the housekeeping, besides conscientiously fulfilling the heaviest and most important of all her tasks—the care of Miss Wayte's enormous collection of curiosities and old furniture.

This alone was the work of at least one able-bodied housemaid, for every floor but the basement was crammed with a jumble of old china, battered antique silver, miniatures, brasses, inlaid tables, Jacobean chests, painted cupboards, Dutch dressers, worm-eaten oak carving, and cabinets of all shapes and sizes, not to mention idols, armour, tapestry, coins, and every description of curio—all purchased by the old lady from time to time at various curiosity shops. It was almost impossible to move about the dingy overcrowded rooms, and yet Miss Wayte continued to add to her store, spending the greater part of a moderate income, and often

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slices of her capital, on the hobby which had finally become an absolute mania. No servant was permitted to touch anything in the house that might lay claim to Miss Wayte's affections by reason of its age or peculiarity, and until the importation of Lydia, she had washed, dusted, and polished her treasures herself, a task which had become beyond her strength; for Miss Wayte was well advanced in years, and expended much of her remaining energies in constant warlike bargainings in curiosity shops and old furniture depôts, which contests were her sole idea of pleasure and recreation.

To Lydia she was not unkind in active sense of the word, merely excessively disagreeable and completely inconsiderate, so that the girl's life was a long, grey level of hopelessly dull monotony and hard work, unrelieved by change or companionship; and that afternoon, as she put the rug, cushion, reticule, and spaniel into the deep, old-fashioned landau, she looked certainly ten years older than her actual age.

She waited listlessly for her aunt, who presently emerged from the house, a spare, shrunken figure, with bead-like eyes and scanty hair, which (to quote the small boy in *Punch*) "seemed to have come off the top of her head and got stuck on to

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her chin," a sharp nose and a mumbling, toothless mouth. She wore a rusty black mantle and a conical-shaped bonnet, which was placed well forward on her forehead to conceal the absence of natural covering. She huddled herself into a corner of the carriage, sinking down until only the point of this head-dress was visible over the side, and in a harsh quavering voice bade the coachman drive to "Fiske's."

Lydia's drooping spirits sank lower, Fiske's being a particularly squalid little curiosity shop which Miss Wayte regarded as her own property, for so many years had she patronised its snuffy, evil-smelling depths. She invariably invaded it when she was in a more than usually pugnacious frame of mind, and her appearance was, to the dealer who owned it, a signal for a long afternoon's haggling. He knew precisely what things would tempt her, and though he had never yet enjoyed the satisfaction of getting the better of her over a bargain (and so felt he owed her a grudge), he never relinquished the hope of doing so before her death or his.

For over a fortnight Miss Wayte had not shed the light of her countenance on this inviting spot, and as the carriage stopped in front of the low

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grimy window, which displayed some dusty china tiles, a few battered brass candlesticks, and one or two faded engravings, she alighted on the pavement in a fervour of triumphant anticipation.

She entered the shop, followed by Lydia whose nostrils wrinkled up as they were greeted by a strong smell of dirt and fustiness, an odour which Miss Wayte inhaled as though it had been the rarest of perfumes, while her sharp eyes peered into every nook and corner. She took scant notice of the old dealer, who followed her patiently, pointing out various articles, which she either condemned with unpleasant candour as frauds, or else asserted that she already possessed far better specimens. She told the man he had nothing in his shop that was not made yesterday, accused him of making his living by cheating unsuspecting customers, gave it as her opinion that he ought to have been in gaol years ago, and was altogether more rude and insulting than even Lydia ever remembered her.

The object of these remarks listened sulkily, but forbore to reply, for Miss Wayte had undoubtedly spent a great deal of money in the shop during the past twenty years, and so he suffered her to poke undisturbed amid piles of rotten furniture, to turn

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over with contemptuous fingers trays of old jewellery, to rout out boxes of antique plate, and to abuse him and his stock to her heart's content, while Lydia sat quietly on the nearest object resembling a seat that came in her way, with Pip shivering depressedly on her lap.

An hour passed agreeably for Miss Wayte, who at last announced with final decision that, as there was nothing worth twopence in the place, she would pay a visit to the rival establishment on the opposite side of the street.

"If you will wait one moment, Madam," said the dealer, "I think I have something in the back room that may interest you. Allow me to fetch it."

He darted past his unamiable customer and dived into a dark cupboard beyond, from which he presently emerged triumphantly bearing a curious object of carved ivory that in shape recalled the appearance of a mace that had been hollowed out into a narrow cup. It was stained and dirty, but wonderfully ornamented, the fine carving represented grotesque figures of men and animals finished with the utmost care, and by some ingenious contrivance it rattled when it was shaken; belonging to it were a pair of ivory wands, also carved, of about eleven inches in length.

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"There now!" said Mr. Fiske, holding it up and dusting it airily. "I fancy that bit of ivory could tell some fine tales! It was the property of his Majesty the King of Benin!"

He shook it violently, and it rattled with a weird, unpleasant sound.

"How do *you* know?" demanded Miss Wayte incredulously.

"I purchased it, Madam, from the officer that brought it home himself—Captain Forest. The gentleman's mother, Mrs. Major-General Forest, died lately at Richmond, and I attended the sale of her effects, happening to be down there at the time. I was told at the sale that they called this thing a Sistrum, but what it was used for—that I can't tell you, nor what the ivory sticks have to do with it. All I can say is that it is a genuine curiosity, and you might go a long way and never see such a bit of carving again." He flapped his duster conclusively.

"Forest — Forest —" repeated Miss Wayte thoughtfully.

"I paid an 'igh price for that thing, but I'd let you have it for what I gave."

"It's worth nothing. How much did you give?"

"Four pounds."

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"I'll give you two!" cried Miss Wayte, with the light of battle in her eyes; but to her surprise and disappointment her offer was accepted on the spot.

"It's a dead loss to me of two pounds," said the old man, rubbing his dirty hands; and Lydia fancied she detected a look of malice on his face. "But you're an old customer, and I thought it would please you——"

Miss Wayte cut short his loquacity by handing him the money, and the Sistrum reposed on Lydia's lap during the homeward journey.

"Now I wonder," speculated Aunt Sarah, as they jogged off, "if that old rascal's story is true. Do we know any one likely to have been in Benin who could tell us anything about it?"

Considering that Miss Wayte's circle of acquaintances was extremely limited, this was not probable; but Lydia remained unaccountably silent, her cheeks deepening in hue.

"There was a General Forest who lived near your father's parish in Hampshire. I remember his dying perfectly well when I was staying at the Vicarage, and his widow was left very badly off. That was just before your father behaved like a fool over those speculations. Then there was

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a son in the army—" She paused and gazed intently at Lydia, as recollection returned to her; "weren't you engaged to him, or something of the kind?"

"No; I was never engaged to him," replied the girl in a low voice.

"Well, what became of them? Did Mrs. Forest move to Richmond?"

"I—I think she did."

"And was her son at Benin?"

"I believe so," faltered Lydia.

"And if I had not remembered the name, you meant to sit still and hold your tongue?" exclaimed Miss Wayte shrilly. "You would have allowed me to remain in doubt as to the genuine history of the carving?"

The tears gathered in Lydia's eyes, but she made no answer.

"Did you know Mrs. Forest's address?" continued the old lady, in the same indignant key.

Lydia reluctantly nodded her head.

"Very well then, you will write to that young man the instant we get home, and ask him if the Sistrum was his, and what he can tell us about it. I suppose, if he's alive, the Richmond address will find him sooner or later."

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"Oh no, Aunt Sarah. I couldn't write to him. Indeed I would rather not—*please !*"

Miss Wayte gasped with astonished rage. Never before had Lydia even questioned her orders.

"You ungrateful monkey ! " she croaked, sinking further into her corner, and glaring at Lydia from under her bonnet like a rat peeping out of a hole. "For five years have I fed you, clothed you, given you medicine and every other comfort and luxury, and now you refuse me to do the smallest service. Explain your conduct at once ! "

Lydia's tears fell on to Pip's head, who whined in sympathy. It was impossible for her to explain to Aunt Sarah that she had loved Stephen Forest with all her heart, and that his silence had nearly broken it—that the expected proposal had never come, and that after his father's death (just before her own home had been broken up) he had gone on foreign service, and she had never seen him since, though she had always carefully followed the movements of his regiment in the newspapers. So she maintained a tearful silence, while Miss Wayte railed and stormed for the rest of the drive until the girl was finally reduced to a state of helpless submission, and on entering the house was at once installed by her aunt at an old French bureau in

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the dining-room to indite the desired note to Captain Forest.

She made it as short and business-like as possible, relating the discovery of the Sistrum and the dealer's story, inquiring if he could oblige her aunt by throwing any light upon the subject, and ending by expressing her sincere regret for what she feared must be the death of his mother.

The stiff little letter was then duly posted by Lydia herself with mingled feelings of reluctance and anticipation, and she thought of nothing else the whole evening while engaged in cleaning the ivory under her aunt's supervision. How soon would the answer come? Would he make any allusion to their former friendship and the old happy days? Perhaps the letter would have to follow him all over England—perhaps he was not in England at all—and so on, until her thoughts were interrupted by Miss Wayte.

"That's better!" as the dust and dirt disappeared and the ivory carving began to gleam. "I wonder that villain Fiske allowed it to go so cheap. Very unlike him—which makes me pretty certain he was lying. Now where is it to go? I won't have it in here till I'm sure it's genuine. Take it up to your room."

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So Lydia carried the Sistrum and its wands up to the top of the house to her bedroom, which was already littered with various articles suspected by Miss Wayte of being of doubtful antiquity. It rattled faintly as she laid it down on the dressing-table, and it was the last thing her eyes rested on that night before she blew out her candle.

She lay for some time thinking of Stephen Forest and listening to the grunts and snores of Pip, who reposed at the foot of her bed, until she fell into a restless doze. Then a hideous nightmare came to her, in which she found herself amidst a crowd of almost naked black figures, that leaped and howled and brandished long sharp spears, while their eyes and teeth shone fiercely from their dark faces as they danced madly to the weird, discordant accompaniment of drums and horns.

Then the horrible din subsided, and was followed by a long shuddering cry of anguish, repeated at intervals more faintly till it ceased with a gasping, gurgling sigh. Cold with horror Lydia pushed her way to the front of the crowd, and saw that a man, black like the others that surrounded her, was being tortured to death. She caught a glimpse of a helpless form bound and bleeding, and with a scream she turned to fly. As she ran she heard a

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curious rattling noise which seemed oddly familiar, accompanied by the sound of sharp blows on some hollow vessel. She stumbled forward, fell heavily, and awoke to find herself sitting up crying and trembling, hardly knowing if she were asleep or awake, until she felt Pip crawling to her side and thrusting his nose into her hand.

Then she fancied she heard an uncertain sound in the room, such as might be made by a large moth fluttering about, knocking itself against the walls or the furniture. Pip began to whine dismally and softly, and feeling decidedly nervous, Lydia lit her candle and held it high above her head. All was silent. The Sistrum gleamed back at her in the faint flickering light, and for a moment she thought she saw something crouching before it. She peered fearfully and intently into the shadows. No; she had been mistaken; nothing was to be seen, and if a large moth was in her room it had now settled down.

She glanced at Pip, who was cowering against her pillow; he was wide awake, his round protruding eyes staring beseechingly at her, while his limbs shook, and the hair on his back stood up stiffly. Then he suddenly jumped off the bed, and with his tail between his legs, rushed to the door,

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where he howled and scratched, paying no attention to Lydia's remonstrances. Fearing he would disturb the house, she finally put him outside on the landing with a rug, on which he contentedly curled himself up with apparently every intention of remaining there for the night.

The room seemed darker and more cheerless than usual as Lydia re-entered it, carrying her flaring candle well in front of her, but from out of the darkness the ivory carving seemed to shine malignantly, and a sudden horror of it took possession of her. It looked like some evil, unnatural reptile, with its odd shape and barbaric appearance, and she wondered, shuddering, what ghastly scenes and horrible deeds it had witnessed. She began to connect it with her nightmare, and attributed Pip's behaviour to its presence, and gradually worked herself up into such a state of superstitious terror that she felt she could bear it in the room with her no longer. Regardless of Pip's feelings, she took it up and carried it out on to the landing, where she left it.

Then she looked under her bed and into the wardrobe, locked her door, and laid down feeling more secure, but at the same time somewhat ashamed of her foolish fancies. Shortly afterwards

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she was again disturbed by a sound of scratching at her door, and low terrified whines. Evidently Pip had repented of his sudden desire to sleep on the landing. She got up and opened the door impatiently. The little dog rushed in, almost knocking her over, and went straight under the bed. She stood astonished for one moment, and was then about to return when a faint noise on the landing caught her ears. It was the soft, uncertain *throp-throp* that she had heard in her room. After waiting irresolute for a second with a beating heart, she fetched her candle.

She stepped cautiously out on to the landing, holding the light well before her, and peering anxiously into the darkness. Then the candle fell from her hand with a crash and went out, while she shrieked again and again with fear and horror.

The next instant the landing was full of light and people, the cook, the kitchen-maid, the parlour-maid and the housemaid, all emerged from their rooms, clinging to each other in deadly alarm of burglars; but all they could see was Lydia, who leant faint and helpless against the wall, gasping and shuddering and pointing at the Sistrum on the floor.

"Take it away! Take it away!" screamed the

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girl hoarsely. "There was a man kneeling by it, and he was *red* and *wet* and *shiny!*" She put her hands over her eyes and cowered against the wall.

Then up the stairs came Miss Wayte in all the grotesqueness of her night attire, a shawl over her head, a red flannel dressing-gown wrapped around her, a poker in her hand, and huge night socks on her feet. At this sight Lydia partially recovered her self-control and common sense, and in answer to her aunt's severe inquiries said she supposed she must have imagined it, but that she certainly thought she had seen something dreadful. Then she burst into hysterical sobs.

"I can't help it—I am so frightened. I am sure it is all the Sistrum. There is something awful the matter with it. I can't sleep with it anywhere near me. It makes me dream and see horrible things!"

"It's the enormous supper you eat that makes you dream and see horrible things," scoffed Miss Wayte; "but since you choose to blame an inanimate piece of ivory, will you please put the Sistrum into my room to-morrow? I can't run the risk of being disturbed at night at my age simply because you take it into your head to be afraid

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of a curiosity," and she hobbled downstairs, leaving Lydia to be comforted by the kind-hearted housemaid, who volunteered to keep her company for the remainder of the night, while the three other servants encamped in one room, none of them relishing the notion of being left alone.

The rest of the night passed peacefully, though sleeplessly, for Lydia, and in the morning she acted on her aunt's suggestion, carrying the Sistrum gingerly down and placing it on the least crowded table of the old lady's room, where she left it with a feeling of intense relief.

For the first time for many years, or, at any rate within Lydia's memory, Miss Wayte did not appear to breakfast the following morning, sending down word that she had a cold, adding, of course, that she had caught it on the night of her niece's disturbance on the upper landing. Therefore, Lydia was alone in the drawing-room after breakfast dusting some Indian idols, when the parlour-maid announced "Captain Forest."

Lydia was overwhelmed with shyness; but he seemed so glad to see her, his manner was so kind and tender, and he looked at her so intently that presently the colour rose in her pale cheeks and her blue eyes took fire and brightened, making her

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look more like the girl who had come to live with Miss Wayte five years before

"I got your letter forwarded from Richmond late last night. What a curious thing your coming across that Sistrum! I was so glad to get your address, because I had come up to London on purpose to find out where you were—" He paused significantly.

"Your mother—" faltered Lydia.

"You guessed rightly in your letter; she is dead," he answered gravely; "and I shall miss her more than I can say. But—Lydia—listen to me—her death has released me from my silence. Did you ever wonder why I never asked you to marry me? Or—didn't you care?"

The look in the girl's eyes encouraged him. He went on—

"When my father died, my mother was left very badly off, and every spare penny I had went to help her. So, of course, I could not marry, and all my hopes and dreams seemed at an end. I said nothing to you, Lydia, because I thought if you cared at all for me you would not forget me sooner if there had been no explanation between us—and it was all so hopeless then. But now——"

The ready tears rose to Lydia's blue eyes, and

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she held out her trembling little hands to him,—and at that moment the door opened and in sailed Miss Sarah Wayte. She looked older, thinner, and more ill-tempered than usual. Evidently she had had a very bad night. Lydia wondered, with a spice of secret malice, whether the Sistrum had been to blame! She introduced Captain Forest to her aunt. He assured the old lady of his readiness to tell her all he knew about her purchase, and added that he certainly had brought a Sistrum, answering to the description, home from Benin. Also, he believed it had been sold to a curiosity dealer after his mother's death.

"Shall I fetch it?" volunteered Lydia.

"I thought you were afraid of it," sneered Miss Wayte.

"Not in the daytime!" laughed the girl, and ran lightly upstairs, presently returning with the Sistrum.

"That's the fellow!" said Captain Forest, taking it from her. "I brought it home as being rather a curiosity. There are but two or three like it in existence, and they were only made for the king. My mother couldn't endure the thing, and banished it to a loft because I incautiously told her it was only used at human sacrifices. Whenever the king

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was particularly pleased with the number or manner of the sacrifices he showed his approval by nodding at his Sistrum-bearer, who rattled the thing violently, and struck it with the ivory wands, making a queer hollow sound."

"Oh, it's not true?" cried Lydia, aghast.

"I am sorry to say it is," he answered.

"Oh, Aunt Sarah! I *knew* there was something awful about that thing—" She stopped abruptly, for Miss Wayte had turned ashy white and seemed to be struggling for breath. "What is the matter?" going quickly to her side; "do you feel ill, Aunt Sarah?"

"I am afraid I gave her a shock telling her about the Sistrum," said Captain Forest remorsefully.

Miss Wayte recovered herself with an effort. "Not at all!" she exclaimed in high indignation, yet still speaking with difficulty; "it was nothing to do with the Sistrum. I have a cold which has upset me, and I am not so young as I was."

Then she bade Lydia return the ivory to her bedroom, and when this was done she gave Captain Forest clearly to understand that he might take his leave, which he did, seeing that there was no

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prospect of getting speech alone with Lydia again that day. But, while shaking hands with the latter, he contrived to whisper that he should return the following morning "to tackle Miss Wayte." Lydia's heart sank as she heard him close the hall door. She knew Aunt Sarah would never voluntarily give her up to him; and how could she desert the old lady who had kept her for five years, and who had really grown to be exceedingly dependent on her? Lydia's sense of duty was very strong, so also was her love for Stephen Forest, and her conscientious mind felt torn in two. However, in spite of her anxiety and depression, she cleaned, polished, dusted, and sewed as usual that morning, and after luncheon drove in the landau with Miss Wayte, who persisted in going out, despite her cold, and to Fiske's too, of all places! When they arrived there, she requested Lydia to remain in the carriage while she went inside the shop alone.

In a few minutes she reappeared, her bead-like eyes ablaze with anger, her mouth working, and her bonnet quivering. Behind her came Mr. Fiske himself, rubbing his hands, and with an evil grin of triumph on his wrinkled, dirty face.

"Very sorry not to be able to oblige you,

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Madam," he was repeating, "but I never take anything back once it's paid for, not even when I've had a dead loss over it——"

"Home!" shouted Miss Wayte to the coachman, her voice hoarse with rage; then she turned round and deliberately shook her fist at the curiosity dealer, who stood in his doorway apparently making a polite bow, but in reality doubled up with laughter.

. . . . . .

The next morning Captain Forest appeared on Miss Wayte's doorstep, not actually with the milk, but as soon after breakfast as common politeness would permit. The door was opened by the kitchen-maid, who looked scared and bewildered, while in the hall stood Lydia in earnest consultation with the three other servants.

"Oh, I am so thankful you have come," she cried, running forward when she perceived who it was. "We don't know what to do about Aunt Sarah. Her door is locked on the inside, and we can't make her hear. I have sent for the doctor, I got so frightened, but he hasn't come yet."

"Miss Wayte didn't seem at all like herself last night before she went to bed," volunteered the housemaid in an ominous voice. "She arst me to

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fetch her the kitchen chopper, and she took it into her room with her!'

"She was moving about quite late," continued Lydia, "because I heard her hammering something, and I nearly went down to see if I could help her in any way, but I thought she would not like it. I wish now that I had——"

"Perhaps she has only overslept herself—it's not so very late," said Captain Forest reassuringly. "I'll see if I can make her hear."

He went upstairs, preceded by Lydia and followed by the excited maids. He knocked at the old lady's door, but received no answer, then he banged, rattled, and shouted, but all to no purpose.

"I think I had better burst open the door," he said at last; "she may have had a fit and be unable to speak."

He pressed his shoulder and knee against the panels, exerting all his strength, which was considerable. The woodwork cracked and split and finally gave way, almost precipitating Captain Forest into the room. He stood still for a second, glancing round, while the women held their breath. Then he turned hastily. "Go back," he said authoritatively. "Don't come in till I tell you." And he went inside alone.

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On the hearth in front of the smouldering fire, with her face buried in the ashes, lay the dead body of old Miss Wayte. In one hand was clutched a kitchen chopper, and scattered over the floor, in the fireplace and among the cinders, were splintered pieces of carved ivory.

Miss Wayte had destroyed the Sistrum with her own hands.

"She probably must have been chopping at it for hours," said the doctor afterwards, "and I suppose the exertion brought on a fit. What on earth made her do such an extraordinary thing?"

"I can't imagine," said Captain Forest.

Lydia said nothing. She understood; but at the same time there was no necessity to tell the doctor.

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THE BEAD NECKLACE

WHEN it became known in the village of Hayfield that Adela Roscoe was engaged to be married, every one inquired if the man had money; nobody thought of asking if he were nice till afterwards, because the Major had repeatedly shouted abroad the fact that he intended his daughter to marry a rich man or to be an old maid. Only a few months ago he had sworn himself voiceless and turned the colour of a beetroot for the reason that Chris Mortimer, who was merely the son of a poor clergyman in the next parish, had dared to propose to Adela.

"What! Marry my daughter to a beggarly puppy in the Merchant Service!" he roared at the culprit. "What do you take me for? Let me tell you that the man who marries her must be able to keep a father-in-law in style as well as a wife. Do you hear? The girl's an investment, and one that is going to pay me a thousand per cent. too. You clear out of this, you young

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jackanapes, and if I catch you hanging round, or trying to speak to her, I'll break every bone in your wretched body," &c. &c.

And with such rigid precaution did the unpleasant old gentleman guard his treasure for the next fortnight, that young Mortimer was forced to join his ship and sail away to the South Sea Islands without the opportunity of a word or a look from Adela; and the farewell note he tried to smuggle in, *viâ* the garden boy, was returned to him by post, torn to shreds, in an envelope (unstamped) which bore the Major's crest. The note had contained a passionate assurance of his undying love, an entreaty that she would be true to him, a vow that he would come back with a fortune to claim her—a fortune so large that even her father would be satisfied.

"There is money to be made where I am going," he wrote; "a pal of mine has let me into a secret—it's a dead certainty. Only wait for me and love me, and never think that I shall not return."

But, as we know, Adela did not receive her letter, and the garden boy, who had failed in his best endeavours to deliver it, would have summonsed the Major for knocking out his front teeth, only

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that Mortimer's bribe had rendered him impervious to suffering.

Then one day, when the ineligible suitor had long been safely on the ocean, a tall, black-haired stranger suddenly appeared in company with the Major and his daughter, and the interested public subsequently discovered that he was a baronet, that he was staying with the Roscoes, and that he had been a friend of the Major's before debt and discredit had driven the latter to a remote and cheap country district.

Adela detested their guest—the first they had entertained since her return from the inexpensive French boarding-school where she had been educated, and where she had spent all her holidays from the time of her mother's death. Sir Bennet Falcon frightened and disgusted her; he would stare into her face with his heavy bloodshot eyes until her cheeks grew crimson, and then he would laugh and say it was so refreshing to see a blush. When he was not playing cards or drinking with her father, he would follow her about, talking to her in a way that she did not understand; or he would tease her as if she were a child—pull her bright hair, pinch her cheeks, and chuckle with evil satisfaction when she flew into a rage. He always

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smelt of whisky; his very clothes seemed to have been steeped in spirit; his face reminded her of a gargoyle; his husky voice rasped her nerves; his odious touch made her shiver. But his presence apparently had a soothing effect upon the Major, who now assumed a fatherly attitude towards his only child, sent for a new hat and parasol for her from London, made a fuss about her health and comfort, and insisted that she should retire to bed early. This she was quite ready to do, for as the evening advanced Sir Bennet's attentions grew increasingly nauseating, and she was thankful to escape to her room, though the loud voices and coarse laughter below invariably kept her awake till long after midnight.

The girl was thoroughly miserable. She had given her love to Chris Mortimer, and her tender heart ached for a sight of the young sailor's frank face and direct grey eyes. The future without him seemed dark and hopeless, and she was also tormented with a fearful suspicion, which was justified one sunny morning, when her father called her into the dining-room and said that Sir Bennet wished to marry her.

"Oh! I couldn't," she cried, with horror in her brown eyes. "I couldn't—I couldn't!" She

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put out both her hands as though to ward off the revolting suggestion.

"Now, my good girl,"—the Major began to walk up and down the room blowing out his loose red cheeks, and flapping behind him the tail of his rough shooting coat—"I'm not going to have any nonsense. Sir Bennet is waiting for you at the bottom of the garden, and you'll just go straight and tell him you will be his wife, and say 'Thank you,' as well. What the devil can a miserable chit like you want more? You'll be My Lady; he stinks of money; even *he* can't get through his income, and if you let him go on as he's doing now, you'll be a rich widow in no time, and free to marry your fool of a cabin-boy, or whatever he may be."

But Adela only sank into a chair and cried despairingly. She was gentle and timid by nature, and utterly incapable of openly defying her father's orders.

"Get up and stop that noise," he continued, halting before her. "What do you suppose I asked the man down here for? Why have I let him drink me out of house and home? Why have I allowed him to clear me out at poker? Because I meant him to marry *you*, of course,

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and now he's hooked, you've got to keep him. Gad! To think what this marriage means—" the Major slapped his thigh, shut his eyes, and drew a long breath. "It means Life and the World once more! Do you think I'm going to stay and rot in this infernal hole, when there's an easy way out like this? No; I've made a damned good bargain, and you're not going to upset the apple-cart, my lady, I can tell you. Come along——"

He dragged her to her feet, giving her an impatient shake, and with a storm of bad language he drove her before him through the little hall and out of the front door; then he stood in the porch, his legs apart, and menace in his attitude, while with bowed head and faltering footsteps the girl went blindly towards the figure that waited in the distance.

There followed a week of misery for Adela. She felt as though she had committed some horrible crime; she had broken her promise to the man she loved; she was Sir Bennet's promised wife, and there was no chance of escape,—for Chris was hundreds of miles away across the seas and could not help her. What would he think when he came back and found she was Lady Falcon? Would he

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ever understand and forgive? The wedding day was fixed; Sir Bennet wrote by every post for presents for his fiancée; he was even paying for her trousseau, a proceeding that gratified the father as much as it annoyed the daughter; the two men were boisterous and triumphant, and apparently quite unaffected by the white face, despairing eyes, and spiritless manner of their victim.

Then it became necessary for Sir Bennet to go to London that he might interview lawyers and tailors, arrange about settlements, and the opening of his town and country houses. He was away for three weeks, and Adela felt almost happy by contrast when relieved of his hateful company, though the thought of the future hung like a dark cloud over her mind. The days flew by, and the end of her respite was at hand; this evening Sir Bennet would return with his evil face, his atmosphere of dissipation, and his noxious love-making. She sat at the open window of her little drawing-room, her hands lying limp in her lap, her wistful eyes gazing out at the wealth of summer flowers, the hovering butterflies, the happy birds; she was thinking of Chris as one thinks of a dear, dead friend, with a dumb regret, a finality of sorrow, an absence of hope.

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The garden gate clicked and the village postman hurried up the drive. She took the letters from him through the window and nodded pleasantly as the man touched his cap and turned away. There were some bills for the Major, and a curious-looking packet for herself sewn up with red cotton in dirty wax-cloth. The address was blurred and indistinct, but the handwriting brought the colour flooding over her face and neck, and she put it to her lips with a gasp of pleasure. Then she tore it open with shaking fingers and searched desperately for the letter that she felt convinced would be inside, but only a barbaric-looking necklace of faded beads fell on to her lap, and apparently Chris had sent it to her without a word. It was a bitter disappointment, and the tears ran down her cheeks as she examined again and again the wrappings of her strange present. She held the necklace up, and wondered why Chris had wanted her to have it; the beads were common glass, and were strung on to something that looked like stiff brown thread, but they were arranged in squares with curious lines and patterns, and she had certainly never seen anything quite like it before. At any rate it had come from Chris, his dear fingers had held it, his hands had packed it up; she would treasure the

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wrapper on which he had written her name, and to-night she would wear the necklace, hideous though it might be, as a charm to give her strength for the ordeal of Sir Bennet's return.

She looked enchanting when she came down to the drawing-room that evening before dinner: her cheeks were flushed with emotion; her eyes dreamy with memories of her lost lover; her white gown threw up the brilliance of her hair and added to the shapeliness of her slight figure; the quaint bead necklace lay round her delicate throat. Sir Bennet stood on the hearth-rug: he had asked for a fire, though the summer night was warm to closeness, and he spread his shaking fingers over the flames; his eyes were dull, and his swollen lips twitched as he greeted the girl and kissed her unwilling face. He had evidently been drinking more heavily than usual during his absence.

"What's that ugly thing round your neck?" he asked, and as he peered at the beads a look came into his face as though some unpleasant recollection had been awakened. Adela murmured an incoherent reply. She wished now she had not worn the necklace, and she felt relieved that her father was not in the room to ask further questions. She could hear him in the dining-room drawing corks.

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"Come and sit here," said Sir Bennet, flinging himself into a corner of the sofa. She tried to evade his clutch, but he pulled her down into the vacant place by his side.

"See what I've brought for my little white bird." He fumbled in his pocket and produced a long morocco case. "Open it! I'll bet you've never seen anything to equal what's inside."

She pressed the spring without any feeling of pleasurable curiosity, and beheld a diamond necklace that startled her with its brilliance—it seemed to be made of captive lightning.

"There!" croaked Sir Bennet. "What d'ye think of that? Take that dirty little bead thing off your pretty neck and put this on."

He dragged at the beads as though he would break the fastening, but it held firm.

"Oh! don't," cried Adela; "you'll break it."

"Well, and what then? Who gave it to you?" he asked with sudden fierceness.

Adela, fearful of being pressed on the subject, nervously undid the string and let him take her treasure from her, and again the look of uneasy recollection, almost fear, came into the man's eyes.

"I've seen these things before," he said shortly; "natives wear 'em in the South Sea Islands—"

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He put it in his pocket, then clasped the diamonds round her neck and regarded the effect with satisfied complacence. "There!" he added, "that's better."

"May I have my beads back?" she asked timidly, when she had thanked him for his gift with forced gratitude.

"No," he answered, and set his jaw. "I don't want to see a thing like that on your neck again; it's only fit for savages, and it reminds me of a deuced bad time I had once in my life which I prefer to forget. There's the gong." He rose and offered her his arm.

During dinner he was inclined to be sullen and quarrelsome; he ate little, but drank freely of the Major's whisky; and when Adela left the room he got up with difficulty to open the door for her. She passed him swiftly, avoiding his gaze, and fled to her room, where she railed in helpless bitterness against the cruelty of her lot, cried over the loss of her necklace, and kissed the wrapping it had travelled in.

Later, she heard the two men leave the dining-room and come stumbling up the staircase. Her father was laughing foolishly, and Sir Bennet was talking fast in a curious high-pitched tone.

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"But didn't you *see* the fellow, Roscoe?" he was saying as they passed her room, and his voice reminded her of a day when she had visited a large hospital and the raving of a delirious patient had reached her ears through a half-closed door. "He looked into the dining-room twice, and then, when we came out, he was hiding behind the curtain in the hall—Lord! he's coming up the stairs now—keep him back, Roscoe, for the love of Heaven—stop him—give me time to lock my door——"

There was a rush of unsteady footsteps down the passage, a loud slam, a helpless giggling laugh from the Major as he blundered into his own room, and then all was quiet. Adela shuddered and turned wearily to the open window; she leaned out and inhaled the fragrance of the flowers beneath, the cool sweetness of the night air; little white moths brushed past her face, and now and then a bird called from the trees at the end of the garden. A faint hint of the rising moon was stealing over the sky, and Adela sat motionless and inert while the weird light slowly increased and clove the darkness into blocks of shadow.

Suddenly the sound of a muffled cry within the house made her start and draw back her head.

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Again she heard it, and her heart beat quickly with apprehension. She opened her door and listened; in his room at the end of the passage Sir Bennet seemed to be running violently to and fro and calling hoarsely for help, but before she could dart across to rouse her father, a dishevelled figure with a white terrified face and wild eyes rushed past her and down the stairs. She heard the hall-door bang, and the thud of running feet over the lawn.

In a moment she was at her father's bedside. "Get up—get up!" she shouted, shaking him desperately, "Sir Bennet must have gone mad—he has rushed out of the house half dressed—Father! Father!"

But the Major snored on; she was powerless to rouse him from his heavy stupor, and she ran in bewilderment back to her open window. The moonlight was streaming over the smooth grass; and, in and out among the bushes, as though pursued by a relentless enemy, ran Sir Bennet, stooping, doubling, dodging. His heavy steps and panting breath throbbed on the night air, and once or twice he half fell, recovering himself with a low hunted cry.

It was a sickening sight, but the girl's courage

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rose unexpectedly, as sometimes happens with timid natures in a sudden crisis. She leant out of the window and called to him. At the sound of her voice he stopped, then hurried towards her and held up his hands. His face, in the moonlight, drawn with terror and delusion, was ghastly.

"Come down!" he called, "come down and help me drive him away—he is waiting there under the trees. If you are with me perhaps he will go, but alone I cannot escape from him, and he will hunt me to my death. After all these years he has come for his revenge—Adela! Adela!"

The fear and supplication in his voice were pitiable; she braced her nerves and prepared to go down. Perhaps her presence would soothe and influence him—even if he should kill her in his delirium it would be better than living to be his wife.

"Wait," she cried softly, "I am coming." And presently her hand was on his trembling arm, and she was firmly reassuring him that he was safe from his imaginary pursuer. She led him to a garden bench under the dining-room window, and he sat down a shaking, huddled heap.

"It was that cursed necklace you were wearing," he stammered; "it made me think of him—the

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natives on the island used to wear them—" He stopped and drew his hand across his wet forehead. "Of course I didn't really see him—he has been dead for years," he glanced about him fearfully, "and yet he looked into the dining-room, he followed me up the stairs—he was in my room," his voice rose and he gripped her hands, "I am going to tell you all about it—the whole truth—perhaps that will keep him away and satisfy him?"

"Yes," said Adela soothingly, "yes—tell me."

His grasp tightened on her hands, and he began to speak in a harsh, monotonous key, staring intently all the while into the surrounding shadows.

"Years ago I had a friend—a friend who stuck to me when I was under a cloud and people were cutting me; we went away together yachting—he sacrificed a lot to go with me. We cruised about in warm climates and stopped at ports we had never heard of, and at last we got among the South Sea Islands. Then there was a storm—my God, what a storm!—it was like the end of the world—and the yacht went down. All night Horsley and I clung to the same piece of wreckage, and in the morning we were washed ashore, the only survivors. It was a long low island, and the natives were cannibals—we saw

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them at it one night, watched them through the cocoa-nut palms by the light of the fire they had made, and then we knew what they were keeping us for. We were guarded day and night, though they let us wander within certain limits, and gave us a hut to live in. We saw no ships, we had no chance to build a boat, or escape by swimming, and day by day we waited for our death. Then Horsley ran a poisonous thorn into his foot and had to stay in the hut, and one morning when I went down as usual to the shore in the hope of seeing a sail, there seemed to be no natives on the watch. All night they had been singing and tom-toming, and I suppose the guards had got careless and were asleep, for I saw none of them about. Just as I was thinking of going back through the palm grove to the hut to tell Horsley there might be a chance to take to the sea, a ship came round the corner of the island. She was only a small trading vessel that had got out of her course, but she meant rescue if the natives didn't spot her. I looked all round—there wasn't a soul in sight, the ship was only a few hundred yards off, the water was calm, and I could swim well. I thought if I went back for Horsley, who couldn't walk with his bad foot, the natives would

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have time to see the ship, and the chances were we should be intercepted and killed. The ship's captain would never send a boat ashore and risk the lives of his crew, I knew that—and I knew if I got away I should be leaving Horsley to a cruel death. I swear I fought the temptation, but all the same I took off my clothes and swam for my life. I reached the ship, I told them about Horsley, but they refused to do more than give me shelter, because the natives of that island were known to be savagely hostile; and we steamed away into safety while Horsley was left there alone——"

He ceased abruptly, his mouth open, his breath coming in quick gasps; he pointed towards the trees :—

"There! Don't you see him? Over by the bushes—he hasn't gone, I've done no good by telling the truth—he is coming out into the moonlight on the lawn—Ah!—I can't bear to see his face. Go back, Horsley!" he shouted; "I never meant to leave you, I meant to get the ship's boat and fetch you—I swear I did;" he pushed past Adela's restraining hand, and ran with superhuman swiftness down the path.

She heard him crash through the old wooden

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gate, and his rapid footsteps rang clear on the hard road; faster, faster they sped into the distance, until the echo died away on the still night air.

. . . . . .

Extract from a local newspaper :—

"An inquest was held yesterday on the body of Sir Bennet Falcon, Baronet, who was found drowned in a pond two miles from the village of Hayfield, where he had been staying on a visit to his friends, Major and Miss Roscoe. The jury returned a verdict of suicide whilst temporarily insane; and much sympathy is felt in the neighbourhood for Miss Roscoe, to whom the deceased gentleman was engaged to be married. We regret to learn that the young lady is at present lying dangerously ill from the effects of the shock, and grave doubts are entertained as to her recovery."

But Adela was called back from the borders of death by news which gave her the promise of a happy future. The secret that had been imparted to Chris Mortimer by his obliging friend had lived up to its character of "a dead certainty," and Chris would be arriving home in a few months' time a comparatively rich man. The precious

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life-giving letter rested day and night beneath Adela's pillow, but in it there was one paragraph which shocked and startled her, and which she never willingly re-read :—

"I wonder if you ever received a rum kind of necklace I sent you? I know you didn't get the letter I wrote at the same time, because the fellow who took it on shore confessed afterwards that he had lost the letter, though he swore he posted the little parcel. I saw an old native wearing the necklace, and it struck me as being rather curious, so I persuaded him to sell the thing, though he made an awful fuss about parting with it, and said it was a most powerful charm against ill-luck; so, being a superstitious sailor, I thought I'd send it to you!—but I'm sorry I did, because I heard later that it had a nasty history. The beads were supposed to be strung on the sinews of a white man who was killed some years ago on one of these islands before the savages were routed out and taught better manners, and though it's probably only a yarn, you'd better throw it away or give it to some one who has a taste for gruesome curiosities. You shall have pearls instead, my darling, and soon I shall be home to fasten them round your neck myself. . . ."

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NO. 1249

THERE is no dulness to compare with the dulness of a small Mofussil station in the rainy season, and when Anderson, our police officer, came back to us after his three months' leave home, we, who had been left behind in the dreary little head-quarters, welcomed his return as a blessed break in the deadly monotony of the most trying time of the year.

It seemed to refresh us only to feel that less than three weeks ago Anderson, who was talking to us, had been actually in England; that he had come straight from London—from the world of clubs and theatres, restaurants and hansoms; we listened, absorbed, to his experiences and descriptions, we envied his new clothes, presumably of the latest cut, and his hat, the first straw Homburg we had seen, filled us with reverence. He was a different being from the weary official who had gone away on leave three months ago, stale and oppressed with successive hot seasons,

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the monotony of his work, the enervating limitations of a little civil district; for he had had a splendid time, done all the theatres, seen his old friends, rounded up his rich relations, spent all his savings, and was in high spirits, excellent health, and determined to take furlough next year.

The only disagreeable thing that happened to him during his holiday he told me about much later on—when the novelty of his return had faded, when he had relapsed into the Anglo-Indian, and had ceased to impress us with "how they did things at home now." To my mind it was the most interesting of his experiences, and well worth repeating, which may be done, as it was not told in confidence and can make no mischief. So this was what occurred, according to Anderson.

When he first got home he felt strangely inert and disinclined for amusement, as is often the case when India has sapped a man's energy and enterprise. He thought he had lost touch with England, that his liver was all wrong, and he was uncomfortably haunted by the memory of a 'board-ship flirtation that had nearly become a love affair; and two or three days after

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his arrival in London he cursed himself for a fool for having promised to go to a ball that night with a persuasive relation. He did not dance; he shrank from going amongst a lot of strangers, and was convinced he should not enjoy himself.

"It will wake you up, old chap," the cousin had boisterously assured him, "and my hostess besought me on her knees to bring another man, so I'll call for you to-night. Mind you shave that mahogany-coloured mug of yours decently, and make the most of your scanty locks, for there'll be plenty of pretty women, as well as a first-rate supper."

And then, when Anderson had dressed, and sat for two hours after his dinner smoking and dozing in his rooms over an evening paper, the following telegram was brought to him:—

"Prevented going to-night please turn up and make my apologies to hostess."

Anderson swore long and loud, and determined to ignore the request and go straight to bed. But the arrival of the telegram had roused him. He had finished the paper, and there was nothing else to read; it was really too early to go to bed, and too late to seek a theatre or

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music-hall, so he hesitated, stretched himself with a yawn of boredom, called for a hansom, and prepared to start. He reflected that after all he might just as well go to the ball and have a good supper, and perhaps if chance threw a flirtatiously inclined female in his way he might even make the most of the opportunity.

The ball was at its height when he arrived. It was late, and rows of carriages and hansoms stood between the houses and the square-gardens, with sleepy figures nodding on the box-seats. Anderson entered the hot rooms which were laden with the sickly scent of dying flowers, shook hands with his hostess whom he had never before seen, and made his cousin's excuses. He was introduced to a very unattractive-looking girl, and, after anxiously inquiring which dances she had free, promptly regretted that he was already engaged for all the numbers she named.

Then he strolled about and scrutinised the guests and decorations, went down to the supper-room and had a glass of champagne, sauntered up towards the ballroom again, and, on the landing, met one of the handsomest women he had ever seen in his life. She had a superb figure, masses of dark red hair, a skin like white satin,

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and large brown eyes with thick lashes. She looked straight into his face, and, seeing that she was alone, he yielded to an impulse and deliberately approached her.

"Aren't you Mrs. Thomson?" he said, bowing, and mentioning the first name that came into his head.

She smiled, showing her strong white teeth. "No," she replied demurely, "I am not Mrs. Thomson, but I know I am very like her. I have often been taken for her before."

This was sufficient; and when her partner returned, bringing her an ice, they were chatting easily. In a little while the other man offered her his arm. She took it and threw a glance at Anderson over her shoulder.

"Ours is the next dance," he said boldly.

"Yes," she answered; "you will find me here."

Anderson grinned to himself, and went downstairs for another glass of champagne. The rooms were like ovens, and coming away from the supper-room he paused at the front door for a breath of cool air. Some of the guests were going home, or moving on to other entertainments, and figures in dainty wraps were

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passing through the hall and down the red-cloth pathway from the house. Carriage doors were slammed, orders rang out in the still night air. The row of patient vehicles was growing shorter, and a hansom now headed the line by the railings, exactly opposite the door.

"Cab, sir?" shouted the driver, as Anderson looked out; and, having misunderstood the answer, moved his horse up to the edge of the pavement.

"No, thanks," repeated Anderson, stepping forward to rectify the mistake.

The light fell on the cabman's face, which showed a singular appearance of good breeding, though the features were prematurely aged and coarsened; his voice too, as he replied apologetically, was clear and cultivated. He returned to his place, and as the figures 1249 on the back of the hansom showed up distinctly for a moment, Anderson wondered vaguely what could have brought the fellow down to the level of a mere number. It caused him to muse a little on the fortunes of some men's lives; he had known the son of a baronet working in a biscuit factory, and an old school friend had ultimately been glad to take the post of a 'bus conductor,—of course their own faults, poor devils, for throwing away their

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chances. Probably No. 1249 had no one but himself to thank for his present position.

Anderson turned back into the house, and found couples streaming down the stairs towards the supper-room. He hurried up to the landing to wait for his siren, and soon she came, all slow smiles, and white shoulders, and beguiling brown eyes.

"My partner has to go away now," she explained, "that is why I have come before our dance has begun.

"'It's an ill wind—'" quoted Anderson, and offered her his arm; "and now that everybody is going down to supper we may get a seat in peace and quiet on the balcony."

He pressed her arm as they crossed the empty ballroom, and imagined he felt a slight response. They advanced to the parapet of the balcony where they found two chairs, but before seating herself the lady leaned over and looked down into the street, her splendid beauty lit up clear and distinct by the lights below.

"There's my last partner going away," she remarked idly.

Anderson leaned over the parapet too, and they watched the man get into his brougham and drive

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away. Then they sat down; he drew nearer to her, and they talked in low tones—a curious intermittent conversation, not of the theatres, or the weather, or of any current topics, but of favourite failings and personal feelings.

"The secret of happiness," she said at last, "is to be answerable to nobody for one's actions, to be free from responsibility. My life would have been unbearable if I had not claimed, and fought for independence. As it is, I can *live!* I am without ties, thanks to myself; I am young enough still, and," she bent towards him, "I am not ugly?"

Anderson lost his head.

"You are maddening," he whispered, and hurriedly and fiercely he entreated that he might kiss her. He urged that it would be a moment's Heaven to him, and need mean nothing to her, if, after that night, she never wished to see him again.

"Let me kiss you!" he demanded hoarsely.

She rose from her chair, and, looking at him, laughed low. He sprang forward and his hands closed on her bare arms. She pushed him away.

"Take care!" she said, keeping him back; "that cabman over there can see us.'

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At that moment the music struck up behind them; people began to crowd into the ballroom; they were no longer safely alone, and Anderson cursed the dancers, and the cabman, and everything that kept him from her lips. He followed her unwillingly from the balcony, till, in the full blaze of the electric light, she stood looking at her programme ready to mark their next dance together.

Suddenly, with a shock, a swift revulsion of feeling overtook him; in a second he realised that the woman's beauty was diabolical; her evil attraction sickened him, and he shrank from her. Another man approached her and, while they spoke to each other, Anderson turned abruptly and hurried, dazed and giddy, from the ballroom and down the staircase. He got his hat and coat, and passed out of the front door. No one was leaving just then, and he paused on the pavement to breathe.

Opposite the house there still stood the hansom, No. 1249, whose driver had been, perhaps, a witness of his flirtation on the balcony. The man wheeled his cab round without a word, and seemed to take it for granted that he would be engaged. Mechanically Anderson got in, and they started at

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a sharp trot, the horse's hoofs ringing clear. London was solemn, quiet, mysterious: strange-looking carts rumbled slowly along; the air felt cool and fresh with the coming dawn.

The pace quickened. They shaved an island, and swayed over towards the opposite curbstone. Anderson began to wonder if his gentleman cabby were drunk, and reflected that probably this was the failing that had converted him into No. 1249. Fortunately the route was pretty clear; the pace increased; they skirted a lamp-post, and swayed again across the road. The driver whipped his horse and shouted an oath in his well-bred voice; the animal threw up its heels, put down its head, and bolted.

They tore up Grosvenor Place like a fire-engine, followed by the warning shouts of policemen and the few people on the pavements; Anderson declares he can never understand why the smash did not come sooner. A dozen times he felt certain they were over as they struck curbstones, lamp-posts, islands, and grazed the wheels of carts, or other cabs. But still they clattered and crashed on their headlong way till, just as they reached Hyde Park Corner, the horse suddenly fell with a hideous shock and scuffle. The cab-

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man shot through the air; the cab seemed to rattle into a thousand pieces—and then for Anderson all was darkness.

. . . . . .

When he came back to consciousness he was in St. George's Hospital, bruised, shaken, bewildered, but otherwise unhurt. He was told that the cabman had been fatally injured and was not expected to last many hours. Strangely enough, they said, he kept asking to see his late fare, and partly from pity, partly from curiosity, Anderson went to him before he left the hospital.

The man's face was drawn and grey; his eyes looked ghostly and unnatural, and he was calling hoarsely for the gentleman he had driven in his cab.

"I am here," said Anderson quietly, laying his hand on the twitching, plucking fingers.

"Ah!" he gasped, and glared like a hunted animal, "you are alive, and I am going to die—I meant to kill you—I tried my best, but I failed—I was mad when I saw her on the balcony—I knew her the moment she looked over—and I saw you with her—I saw you— She will wreck your life, if you let her, just as she ruined mine, just as she dragged me down into the mud—

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and kept me there— But I loved her—I loved her—and even now——"

"What was she to you?" asked Anderson, bending down to catch the fluttering sentence that came in answer to his question,—the last words that No. 1249 ever spoke:

"She—she was—my wife."

Anderson says he thinks I make too much of that story, that it was a curious experience and a very unpleasant one, but his own opinion is that the cabman was either mad or drunk to start with, and mistook a woman he had never seen before for his wife,—if the fellow ever had a wife at all. Anderson believes it would have been just the same whoever had been his partner on the balcony; but I, remembering what extraordinary things do happen, cannot agree with him.

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A MISCALCULATION

THE warm stillness of the Indian noon had crept over the row of white bungalows in the native cavalry lines. Tall plantain trees that shielded the compounds from the dusty road had ceased to wave and bow, for the fitful breeze had deserted them, and their giant leaves drooped limply. Servants and animals dozed in peace after the important midday meal, and even the ever-restless crows and mynas permitted themselves a wakeful rest, since, for the next hour at least, there would be nothing happening in which they could possibly interfere.

An atmosphere of cool, scented repose pervaded the drawing-room of the Fawcetts' bungalow. Punkahs were not yet necessary, but doors and windows were closed against the noonday heat, and muslin curtains, together with bamboo blinds, defended the room from the glare that beat into the veranda. The comfortable easy-chairs, low, broad tables covered with photographs and

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vases of cut flowers, the tall, carved screen from Cashmere, the very walls, washed a pale green and clothed with brackets, pictures, embroidered hangings, seemed to be slumbering, and the only sound that disturbed the sleepy silence was the scratching of Mrs. Fawcett's silver pen and the occasional rustle of foreign writing-paper.

She lay on a long couch in a nest of blue satin cushions, her knees drawn up to support her writing-board, her little silk-stockinged feet peeping from beneath her skirts of lace and muslin. She had kicked off her absurdly high-heeled shoes and they lay in abandoned attitudes on the floor.

"I have made up my mind," she wrote to her mother. "I am coming home at once. Things have reached a climax, and I will no longer shut my eyes to the fact that Allan gambles and drinks, though for months I have been trying to deceive myself and other people. In addition to this he has become so unreasonably jealous of me that he makes my life a perfect burden, and we quarrel frightfully when we are alone together, which I take good care is not often. Last night, however, I did ask him to come with me to a dance instead of going to the club, and he refused because he says he hates dances; but he offered to stay at

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home if I would do so too! I told him what I thought of his selfishness, and I went to the dance, for at any rate *my* pleasures are harmless. He went to the club, and came home half tipsy, and then we had what I determined shall be our last row for some time to come. I mean to give him a real good fright by leaving him and coming home, and I have told him I shall stay away until he can behave himself. It is to be hoped, between ourselves, that he will not take too long pulling himself together, for as you know I love India and hate England. Out here I can have a very jolly life with our pay and the allowance Allan's mother sends him; but the income divided up would give me a very poor time at home. But Allan must be taught a lesson at any sacrifice to myself. He was not like this when I married him three years ago (though I am told he was always considered rather wild), and I will put up with the present state of affairs no longer. The other day I spoke about Allan to his cousin, Michael Browde, who is magistrate here, thinking he might do some good; he is an odious man, but Allan is fond of him and believes to a certain extent in what he says. Browde had the impertinence to tell me it was greatly my own fault!

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and only made all sorts of impossible suggestions. Of course men always side with each other, and he was no help at all; so now he can have the pleasure of looking after Allan while I am away, and certainly *he* is steady enough in all conscience. I am afraid, dear mother, you will see a great change in me, for I am worried to death with bother and anxiety——"

Suddenly a man's voice sounded in the veranda, the stamp of heavily booted feet, the ring of spurs and rattle of a charger's bit; and before Mrs. Fawcett had time to lay aside her writing-board and put on her shoes (in case her husband was not alone) Captain Fawcett had entered the room. He was a short man, but well made, broad and sturdy, with square features, blue eyes, a ruddy skin, and dark curling hair, that from the heat outside and the discomfort of uniform now lay in wet little rings on his forehead.

He drew his handkerchief from his sleeve and mopped his face. There was anxiety and hesitation in his manner, for he had not seen his wife since the "last row" of the previous evening.

"Home letters?" he asked nervously.

"Yes," she answered without looking up.

He waited a moment, regarding wistfully the

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dainty figure on the coach, the gleaming hair, the fair little face so cold and set.

"What have you said?"

"What I told you last night I should say."

"Then—then you meant it? You are going to leave me?"

She nodded, her eyes still lowered.

At first he stood motionless, then took a quick step forward.

"Amy!" he said hoarsely

She began to fold up her letter, and he fell on his knees by the couch, catching her wrist.

"Amy, for God's sake think it over. Don't go! I couldn't bear it; I should go to the devil."

"I fancy you've done that already," she said coldly, trying to free her arm.

"I know I've been a hound: I don't wonder you want to go. But only stay with me and help me, and I swear I can give it all up. I kept straight enough when we married — you know I did. And perhaps if I could have got to like the things you like, the picnics, and balls, and infernal dinner parties, and the everlasting shows, I should have been with you more and not so much on my own hook. It's when

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you are not with me, when I don't see anything of you——"

She made no answer, only calmly continued to put her writing things into their places on the board.

He took his hand from her arm and gazed at her, cool, sweet, pink and white (not so terribly altered as she would lead her mother to suppose), lying in her nest of blue cushions, and he groaned in helpless remorse.

"I only ask you to give me another chance, Amy. I've been a fool and let myself drift; but it's not too late to pull up. I *can* pull up, but somehow I got reckless. Other fellows were always after you — and I thought you didn't *care*."

She drew herself away from him.

"You are trying to throw the blame on me," she said, and closed the ink-bottle with a snap.

A sudden rage seized him. He longed to take her by the shoulders and shake her, and to guard himself from doing it he rose and walked to the other end of the room. He turned when he reached the door. His throat was pulsing, his muscles felt stiff, his brain aflame.

"Very well, g—go!" he stuttered. "I shan't

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see much less of you when you're in England than I do now."

. . . . . .

Mr. Michael Browde, of the Bengal Civil Service, walked through the London fog of a November day on his way to call on Mrs. Fawcett at the special request of her husband, his cousin, from whom he had parted in India less than three weeks before. Mr. Browde was home on furlough, and had been only two days in London; but he was a conscientious individual who always kept his word, and he was fulfilling his mission without loss of time, though, had he followed his inclinations in the matter, he would not have fulfilled it at all.

The fog and gloom seemed to grow worse as he turned from the Hammersmith Broadway into a little road that was eminently respectable, but dull, hideous, uninteresting, with an atmosphere of the general servant, and an unsuccessful struggle to keep up appearances, over it all. He passed through a creaking iron gate and mounted a few ill-washed steps to the front door, found no knocker and no bell, but finally spied the latter at the side of the gate. He descended the steps and pulled at the shaky iron hook. He waited

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for five minutes and was about to attack it again when the door opened to disclose an old woman of the "char" persuasion, who strongly reminded him of Dan Leno in a pantomime.

"Is Mrs. Fawcett at home?"

"Yes, sir. Will you please to walk in?"

She lifted a pail and removed it from his path. "We're a bit upset to-day, sir; if you'll please excuse. The cook left larst night sudden-like, and Mrs. Lake—that's Mrs. Fawcett's mother, you may know, sir — she come round to me this morning to know if I could oblige her, and I'm just doin' a bit o' cleanin'."

By this time they had climbed the first flight of narrow stairs, and Mr. Browde found himself ushered into a small drawing-room which was homely and comfortable enough, though the carpet was threadbare, the windows dirty, and the furniture on its last legs; á smell of fried bacon hung in the air, and there was no fire.

"I s'pose Mrs. Fawcett's in the dining-room," wheezed the charwoman. "Now I come to think of it Mrs. Lake she do sit there in general in the mornings, not liking to use more coal than there's any call to do. I'll just go and tell her there's a gentleman wants to see her."

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Mr. Browde sat down on a dilapidated basket-chair, and thought of Mrs. Fawcett's surroundings when in India—the large rooms, the spotless servants, the ease, the sunshine, the amusement, the comparative luxury. He glanced round the depressing little room, and the contrast made him smile grimly. When Mrs. Fawcett came in he was standing at the window surveying a row of narrow back gardens, where furtive cats prowled amongst bare branches and blackened walls, and grey-looking linen hung from lines in the fog-laden air.

"Why, I did not know you were at home!" she cried, smoothing her hair and adjusting the tumbled lace at her throat. "I wondered who it could be."

"I arrived from Brindisi two days ago," he said, as they seated themselves. "Allan asked me to see you as soon as possible after I reached London."

"I have not heard from Allan for three mails," she said in an injured voice, "and none of his letters have been much more than mere notes. He tells me nothing I want to hear. I am afraid he is going from bad to worse."

Mr. Browde stroked his day-old top-hat.

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"He was very busy when I left, preparing to take over his new appointment," he said.

"*What* new appointment?"

He mentioned a coveted post on the staff of the Commander-in-Chief, and Mrs. Fawcett stared incredulously.

"Allan has quite reformed, Mrs. Fawcett. After you left him he came over and chummed with me, and he pulled himself together. But it was a bit of a struggle. I know what he went through and what a grip he took of himself. It was fine! He is a good soldier, and they know it well enough at head-quarters, and now he'll get on. He has thrown himself, heart and soul, into his profession at last."

"Then," cried Mrs. Fawcett, rising in triumph from her seat, "it was all he wanted—a good fright! I knew it—I knew I was right to leave him! Now I shall go out as soon as I can get my clothes ready. I shall want a lot for Simla and Calcutta. It will be awfully expensive—but *how* delightful! One does get rewarded sometimes for doing the right thing, doesn't one?"

Michael Browde bit his lips, for wrath was surging in his heart.

"I *hated* having to come home," continued the

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little lady plaintively. "You can't imagine that I *wanted* to return to this," waving her hand with a gesture of disgust.

"And yet," said Mr. Browde slowly, "I am afraid you will have to put up with 'this' for some time to come, Mrs. Fawcett."

"What on earth do you mean?" she demanded in amazement, gazing at him with wide-open blue eyes.

"I am sorry to have to tell you," he answered, "but Allan made a point of my doing so, that there might be no possible misunderstanding. He does not want you out again, Mrs. Fawcett."

"What?" she screamed. "How *dare* you say such a thing! Allan is simply devoted to me; I can twist him round my little finger! He begged me—*begged* me to stay with him. You are telling lies. You always hated me!"

"I can only deliver the message your husband charged me with," said Mr. Browde, rising; "he will send you what he can afford, and he hopes you will live with your mother. But to put it plainly, even brutally, he can do without you, he doesn't want you, and he does not wish you to return to India. He will take leave home to see you whenever he can get it."

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His heart, full of anger though it was against the woman, smote him when he saw the look on her face as she slowly realised that he was telling her but the truth.

For two or three seconds there was a tragic silence. Then she held out her hands in piteous entreaty for the restoration of all she had destroyed.

"*Allan!*" she cried in a broken voice, and, sobbing, hid her face.

Michael Browde turned and left the room. He went down the narrow staircase, and, avoiding the charwoman's pail, let himself out of the front door. The fog and the gloom outside had deepened: it was bitterly cold. He shivered, buttoned up his coat, and walked away with rapid steps.

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THE PACKET OF LETTERS

"Now you, who have made fifteen voyages——"

"Seventeen," she corrected.

"Seventeen voyages to and from India—you must have had some queer cabin experiences. Which was the most remarkable of them all?"

She looked at her husband, and at first she did not answer. They were retired Anglo-Indians, tanned by years of Eastern sunshine, worn with hot seasons, the unrest of exile, anxieties concerning the large family that had grown up away from them, and the struggle to keep clear of debt. Now they lamented their Indian life in a comfortable suburban villa, and were entertaining me at dinner because, thirty years ago, my people had been in the same station with them, and they recollected me as a child before I was sent home. They talked of my old bearer, and the white pony I used to ride! Anglo-Indians always seem to have such astonishing memories.

"I know which voyage you are thinking of,"

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said the Colonel: "tell the story, mem-sahib. Perhaps you have found somebody who will believe in it."

She gave him a look of reproach, then turned towards me with hesitation.

"It seems rather unfair to tell it."

"I'll forget it directly afterwards, if you like," I urged, "but do let me hear it."

So she told me that one autumn, not many years ago, she had taken her passage out to India in a very crowded ship, and therefore she considered herself unusually lucky, when she got on board, to find that she was to share her two-berthed cabin with a lady who had no infant, and who seemed peaceably inclined.

"She was in the cabin when I went down to unpack," continued my hostess, "but she had not begun to open her boxes, and she offered to absent herself till I had settled my belongings, as she thought we should hamper each other if we attempted to unpack at the same time. Her voice was clear and soft; she was a little woman, young, with pretty yellow hair and violet eyes. Her manner was shy and gentle, and she was dressed quietly, almost to dowdiness. Being an old and seasoned traveller, I had no scruples

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about taking advantage of her offer, and when she had gone I proceeded to appropriate the most convenient hooks, to annex the looking-glass nearest the light, and to hang my cabin 'tidy' in the best space. I had engaged the top berth, for I was a good sailor and never cared to run the risk of having my face trodden on. My number was 14, and as I arranged my things I wondered idly whether Mrs. Duke (the name painted on the luggage waiting to be unpacked) was of a superstitious nature, her berth being No. 13. I also congratulated myself on having such an apparently amenable companion for the voyage. I had travelled with invalids, with a missionary's wife who had twin babies and no servant, with girls going out to be married—generally the most inconsiderate of all fellow-passengers — once I had a lunatic in my cabin, and another time a woman who drank. But with Mrs. Duke there seemed no prospect of any disagreeables; and when I went to bed that night to find her asleep, and the cabin clear for me to undress comfortably, I felt that there was even a possibility of my enjoying the voyage.

"'Who is her husband?' I inquired of an acquaintance on board; and I was told that

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he belonged to some obscure and uncovenanted department up in the Punjab, was twenty years older than his wife, and that he adored her.

"'And she?'

"'Oh! a pattern of all that a wife should be, and devoted to him. But she's rather stupid, and hasn't very good health. I never saw much of her when we were in the same station together: she has to go home for the hot weather whenever they can afford it.'

"Mrs. Duke was not very sociable with the other passengers on board; the only person she talked to much besides myself was a young civilian who gave himself airs because he was private secretary to a Lieutenant-Governor. But though she sometimes let him read poetry to her on deck in a loud, patronising voice, and he sat next to her at meals, she was invariably discreet in her behaviour and never made herself conspicuous. Mrs. Duke was evidently a reserved little person, and this was a characteristic that pleased me,—for I detest the responsibility of unnecessary confidences—and we became very good friends before we reached Port Said. She was always good-tempered and considerate, and she spoke little of her own affairs beyond regretting the

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fact that she had no children, occasionally speaking with the utmost affection of her husband, and sometimes she mentioned how much she looked forward to their meeting at Bombay. The nearest approach we made to any intimate conversation was one night in the Red Sea, when I went down to the cabin rather earlier than usual, and found her seated on her box poring over what looked like a packet of letters. She locked it away in her trunk when I entered, and began to brush out her pale golden hair with energy.

"'I'm so sorry I'm not in bed,' she said sweetly. She always behaved as if she were in my cabin on sufferance.

"'Oh! it's all right,' I assured her; and while I undressed she plaited her beautiful hair into a gleaming rope.

"'Do you think,' she said suddenly, 'that under some circumstances one is justified in deceiving a person one is very fond of?'

"'Well, if knowledge of the truth would only give pain and do no good——'

"'But I mean—supposing now you had done something that wasn't exactly right, though you had meant no actual harm, would you feel justi-

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fied in concealing it from a person who would certainly consider it very wrong indeed?'

"I looked at Mrs. Duke in some surprise. 'It would depend so entirely on who the person was,' I said.

"'Well, your husband, for instance?'

"I thought of my husband, growing furrowed and grey with years of hard work, intent on his profession, proud in the consciousness that he had done his best for his children, that he had risen high in his department, had a comfortable old age before him, and a wife who agreed with him in everything. I could not imagine myself concealing from him a pleasure that I might think harmless and that he would consider wrong. The idea was too psychological for my matter-of-fact brain.

"'I think deception under any circumstances is a mistake between husband and wife,' I said loftily; 'perhaps it might be necessary to conceal something that would worry your husband, but in that case it would hardly be anything you had done yourself!'

"'I can't explain,' she sighed, and with her pathetic blue eyes, pink dressing-gown, and yellow plait, she reminded me of a coloured picture in a Christmas Annual.

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"The next morning we reached Aden, and she landed to lunch with some friends and have a few hours on shore. She tried to persuade me to go with her, but I refused, preferring even a steamer coaling to 'the barren rocks,' and from the deck I watched Mrs. Duke start off in a boat with the private secretary in attendance. She turned and waved to me, and that was the last time I saw her alive.

"Two hours later the young civilian came back with a white face and horror in his eyes.

"'Where is the captain?' he stammered, as he stepped from the gangway: 'something awful has happened!'

"'What is it?' I asked, and followed him along the deck. 'Where is Mrs. Duke?'

"He shivered and turned round; his boyish face was drawn and old with the shock.

"'She is dead,' he whispered; 'I hardly know what happened, it was all so sudden; but she walked up to her friend's house in the sun,—she was so delicate, you know—and I suppose the heat and exertion—anyway, just as I was leaving her at the door she was taken ill. We thought she had only fainted, but when the doctor came he said she was dead—quite dead! My God—I can't believe it! I must find the captain at once!'

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"'Yes, the captain must telegraph to her husband before the ship sails,' I said, and with my mind stunned by the awful news I went to my cabin to try and realise the truth.

"The poor little woman's things were all so tidy, her box was pushed well under her berth (ill-fated No. 131), her toilet trifles, so neat and unostentatious, were lying in their places. I thought of the fair hair and pathetic blue eyes, and my heart ached for the husband in the trouble that was coming to him.

"There was no doubt about the melancholy fact. Before the ship sailed the captain was in possession of all details from shore; a telegram had been despatched to Mr. Duke, the dead woman's belongings had been removed and sealed up by the captain, and the voyage continued with a gloom over us all. I was asked if I should prefer to change my quarters, but I refused: I was not afraid to be alone with memories of my poor little cabin companion, though for the first two nights I slept badly, thinking of the young life so suddenly checked, and of the husband's grief.

"On the third night I went to bed early; I was tired and in want of rest, and I soon fell

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asleep. But later on in the night something woke me up, and as I lay and listened, my travelling clock struck two. I wondered what had roused me, and presently I became conscious that some one was in my cabin. It sounded as if a hand were groping under the lower berth.

"'Who is it?' I asked loudly.

"There was no answer, and I turned on the electric light, which was close to my head, raised myself on my elbow, and looked down. A figure was kneeling on the floor by the lower berth, and the white face that was slowly uplifted towards me was the face of Mrs. Duke.

"At first I was breathless with astonishment, and then a cold terror crept over me as I lay and stared; but when she stood up, and I saw into her eyes, my fear melted into pity for a soul in trouble. Her slender hands grasped the rail at the side of my bed; her hair shone faintly in the light, and her pale cheeks were wet with tears. 'Oh! do help me,' she sobbed, and despair was in her voice; 'my box is gone, —where is it?'

"I forced myself to speak. 'The captain has

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got all your things,' I said gently; 'he will take care of them.'

"'Oh! but I want my box! it was here: why did they move it? Oh! go to the captain in the morning, I implore you—I implore you; ask him to let you open my box. You will find a packet of letters just inside my writing-case; —throw them into the sea, all of them. No, burn them, for they might float and be picked up! My husband, he must never see them, he must never know——'

"'But what are they?' I whispered: 'why mustn't he know? What had you been doing?'

"She wrung her hands and cried bitterly, 'I meant no harm; I was only vain and foolish. I was so dull at home all alone, and I thought it wouldn't matter. I meant to destroy the letters before we got to Bombay. Oh! take them out of the box; never let him know. Will you promise—promise——'

"'I will do all I can,' I answered solemnly.

"Then, wailing like a tired child, she slid to the floor, and as I looked down she faded from my sight.

"I cannot describe my feeling during the rest of that dreadful night. I can only say that the

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next morning I went to the captain, and, under promise of secrecy, I told him the story. As I had anticipated, he was polite but incredulous.

"'You had a very distressing dream or delusion, my dear lady, and it is not altogether surprising considering the recent sad circumstances; but it is quite impossible for me to open Mrs. Duke's box or anything that belonged to her, though I appreciate the kindliness of your motive in desiring me to do so. It would be against all regulations, and I could not undertake the responsibility. I am very sorry to have to refuse, but I think you must see that the poor lady's property could not be opened or anything of hers destroyed on such a pretext as the dream, or vision, of a fellow passenger! Everything must be handed over to her husband just as it is!'

"It was useless to say more. I had fulfilled my promise to do my best, and I knew that the captain was only doing his duty in refusing my request, which must have sounded to him preposterous. But now I dreaded the night time, and I changed my cabin after all. I had no more dreams or 'visions,' to quote the captain, and two or three days later we reached India.

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"Before we landed I heard that Mr. Duke had not come down to Bombay to meet the ship, but had sent instructions that his wife's luggage should be forwarded to him through his agents.

"I went up country and joined my husband. When I told him the story of Mrs. Duke, he was, like the captain, polite but incredulous, and he would not listen to my tentative suggestion that I should write to Mr. Duke on the subject.

"'For goodness' sake don't think of such a thing,' he cried: 'you dreamt or imagined it all, of course, and you'd only make the wretched man more miserable than he is already by putting it into his head that his wife had concealed something from him!'

"So we spoke no more of the matter then, but it was constantly in my mind, for I knew that I had had neither dream nor delusion; and one morning, some three weeks later, I took up the paper and read in it the announcement of a Mr. Duke's sudden death. In another part of the paper I found a sad little paragraph setting forth that Mr. Duke had been suffering from depression since the death of his wife on her way out from England, and that he had shot

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himself whilst temporarily insane. I showed it to my husband.

"'You see,' I said, 'her boxes would just about have reached him—and he did it because he had found the packet of letters.'

. . . . . .

There was a short silence. The Colonel pushed the port decanter towards me.

"Fill up the mem-sahib's glass," he said kindly; "it always makes her miserable to speak of that business."

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THE FOOTSTEPS IN THE DUST

HERE and there, mysteriously, in India exist Englishmen who seem to have been left behind on the strenuous march of British administration; who, from instability, misfortune, or wickedness, have sunk down, not entirely to the level of the loafer, but to a stage where they remain rooted in exile, apparently without home connections, correspondents, or interests, and who live and die in apathetic obscurity, while their histories, curious, pitiful, or unworthy, remain unrecorded and forgotten.

Captain Bogle was one of these derelicts. Being the oldest European inhabitant of Mynapur, he was accepted by the ever-changing officials of the district, who played cards and billiards with him in the little club, and whose wives occasionally asked him to dinner. He was an elderly man, and lived in a miserable little two-roomed bungalow opposite the great white stuccoed mansion owned by Gunga Pershad, the rich Hindoo "buniah,"

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or merchant; but no one could say how long he had lived there, who he was, whence came his means of living, what had been his regiment, or why he voluntarily buried himself in a small civil station in Northern India. There had been rumours; of course: he had eloped with his Colonel's wife and been ruined over the damages; he had been dismissed from the army for embezzling mess funds; he was a Russian spy, a suspected murderer, the rightful heir to a great title, &c. &c. But nothing was ever proved, and Captain Bogle saw Collector, Joint Magistrate, Civil Surgeon, Police Officer, and Engineer, come and go, while his bungalow, and that of Gunga Pershad, remained the only dwellings in the station that still held their original occupants.

Captain Bogle and the buniah were apparently close friends, that is to say, the Englishman had the use of the native's horses, baskets of vegetables and fruit from the rambling garden, and they occasionally attended a race meeting down country together, when it was popularly supposed that if Captain Bogle lost, Gunga Pershad paid up—but not *vice versâ*. In the evenings the couple were frequently to be seen driving in Gunga Pershad's roomy old-fashioned landau drawn by a

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pair of big Australian horses, with a fat coachman in purple livery, and a tatterdemalion outrider clattering behind on a white stallion. Gunga Pershad, clad in a plum-coloured satin coat, with a yellow turban, his loose lips stained red with betel-nut juice, would loll in his seat deep in conversation with his companion whose appearance resembled that of a decayed Mephistopheles.

"It's a queer alliance," said the Civil Surgeon, who had lately been transferred to Mynapur, and had not yet assimilated the accepted customs of the place. "And it's my belief that Bogle gets far more out of Gunga Pershad than meets the naked eye."

"I have sometimes thought so myself lately," replied Petersham, the police officer, with whom the doctor had been dining, and the two were now seated in the veranda smoking their Bahadur cheroots. "And yet the fellow lives on like a half-caste in that little pig-sty of a bungalow, and his clothes would disgrace a rag-and-bone shop."

"You see he drinks," said the doctor.

"I've never seen him drunk, and I've been here six months—worse luck!"

"No, and I don't suppose you ever would. That

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chap's pickled with spirit from head to foot. He can stand any amount, I should say; but it must come to an end sooner or later. It's my belief that he's taught Gunga Pershad the same game—half brandy, half champagne is probably their usual drink. A native does that kind of thing pretty thoroughly when he once takes to it."

The police officer grew thoughtful. "I was here some years ago as assistant," he said recollectively, "and now I come to think of it, Gunga Pershad was then a very different being from what he is at present. He was a smart, healthy-looking fellow, always riding about, and ready for a chat whenever one met him, and now he's fat and bloated and never stirs out except in that old shandridan of his; and he can't look one in the face or answer civilly when he's spoken to. I see a great change in him for the worse."

"Natives go down hill fast when they start, and I fancy our friend the Captain gave him the first shove and keeps him going. My bearer declares that the pair of them sit up till four o'clock every morning drinking and gambling in Gunga Pershad's bungalow."

Then, since the hour was late, and he had to be up early on duty, the doctor said good-night,

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and started home on foot, carrying his own lantern, for all the bungalows in Mynapur were fairly close together. His route led him past the large untidy compound, in the centre of which stood Gunga Pershad's mansion with the deep verandas, pucca roof, and imposing porch. The long doors, reaching almost from ceiling to floor, stood wide open, for the night was hot and airless, and the lofty room facing the road was brightly illuminated with rows of wall lamps, while a great white punkah waved to and fro. Under the punkah stood a card table, and at it sat Gunga Pershad and the Captain, absorbed in their game, with long tumblers full of liquid at their elbows.

The doctor, fascinated by the curious picture, stood and gazed, and presently the native threw down his cards, and stood up gesticulating wildly. Captain Bogle leaned back in his chair, and proceeded to light a cheroot. Then the voice of Gunga Pershad rose in angry remonstrance, though to the watcher outside the words were not distinguishable; but they sounded threatening, beseeching, despairing by turns. The man dragged off his turban, tore his clothes, and beat his breast; he knelt in front of the Englishman, and laid his forehead on the stone floor, and throughout this

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piteous scene the Captain sat apparently unmoved, blowing clouds of smoke through his nostrils. The doctor turned away in disgust. The sight sickened him, it was sordid and revolting, and made him ashamed of his countryman. What did it all mean? That Bogle had been compassing the ruin of Gunga Pershad for some years past he felt convinced, and it now seemed as though a crisis had arrived. Something was going to happen.

And next morning came the news that Gunga Pershad had committed suicide by taking poison; moreover, it eventually transpired that the once rich merchant had died penniless, and that the big bungalow, the landau and horses, the mirrors, chandeliers, marble-topped tables, and all the rest of the garish possessions so dear to the heart of a native, together with savings, and investments, and valuable house property in the bazaar, had all been gambled away to Captain Bogle.

The question most discussed in the station was what the man would do with his evilly won fortune? That he was legally entitled to it all there was no disputing, but public opinion rose high against him, and though curiosity raged in every breast, Captain Bogle found himself ignored when he entered the

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little club, and apparently invisible when he met any one on the road.

This treatment at last caused him to avoid the club and his English neighbours, but he remained on in the shabby bungalow, and only took long solitary drives in the landau so lately the property of his victim. People wondered why he did not occupy the big white house now it was his own, or why he stayed on in Mynapur instead of going home, and old gossip and conjectures concerning him revived with additions and improvements.

Still he continued his curious existence, driving out in the evenings along the hard, dusty roads; and the doctor who met him often on his way back from the Government dispensary, expressed his opinion that the man was on the verge of delirium tremens.

"I saw him yesterday afternoon," he said to Petersham, "driving along jabbering like a monkey, just for all the world as if he had some one beside him! He seemed to be arguing and explaining till I felt quite uncanny. I could have sworn that old Gunga Pershad was sitting next him if I hadn't seen for myself that the seat was empty!"

"He was going on anyhow last night too," said

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Petersham. "I heard him when I was coming home from dining with the Dunnes. You know how close that little hovel of his is to the road; he was standing outside waving his hands and shouting in Hindustani. I pulled up and asked him what was the matter, and he solemnly implored me to go over and tell Gunga Pershad to stop calling him, because nothing would induce him to go over to the bungalow and give the native his revenge at cards. I said, 'My dear chap, Gunga Pershad's dead, how *can* he call you, or play cards, or do anything else?' But he only looked at me like a screwed owl and said he knew Gunga Pershad was dead, well enough, and that was just why he didn't want to go over and play cards with him! We shall have trouble with that fellow, sooner or later."

"I think I'd better go and look him up to-day," said the doctor, who was a kind-hearted individual. But, owing to an unexpected press of work, it was not until after a late and hurried tiffin at a patient's house that he found himself free to visit Captain Bogle.

The little bungalow looked deserted when he drove up to the veranda, and it was some minutes before his shouts attracted the attention of the

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servants. He could hear them laughing, coughing, gossiping in the cook-house. At length a disreputable creature appeared who pronounced himself to be the Captain-sahib's bearer, as he hastily wound a dirty turban about his greasy black head.

"Where is the sahib?" inquired the doctor.

"Huzoor! He commanded the carriage but two hours since, and drove forth to eat the air. Whither he went thy slave knoweth not."

Rather relieved than otherwise the doctor turned his trap round; but as he drove down the road past the opposite compound he caught sight of the well-known landau standing under the porch of the big bungalow, and he drove in through the white gate-posts and up the ill-kept drive. The place had not been touched since Gunga Pershad's death, and the house had stood unlived in and neglected.

When he reached the porch he found the pair of horses standing in easy attitudes with drooping heads, while the coachman and groom were seated on the ground sharing a hookah and conversing in low tones. They had the patient apathetic air of natives, to whom time is no object, and one spot quite as satisfactory as another in which to smoke and discuss the price of food. They

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rose when they saw the doctor, and the fat coachman explained that the Captain-sahib was within the bungalow, and had been there for nearly two hours.

"It be the first time he hath entered the building since the death of Gunga Pershad," he added, as though to account for the length of the visit.

The utter silence of the neglected house struck the doctor with an odd sense of uneasiness. He descended from his trap and looked into the entrance hall. The dust lay thick on the matting, and in the dust, sharply imprinted, were the marks of Captain Bogle's boots. The doctor followed the footsteps, and they led him into the principal room where the dust covered everything. It soiled the satin upholstered chairs and couches, dimmed the mirrors, clung to the dingy punkah frill, and was deep on the floor. In the middle of the vast room was a little green-covered card table with two chairs, one of which had been pushed aside as though the occupant had risen abruptly. Cards were scattered over the table and a few lay on the floor with the remains of a broken tumbler. Evidently, thought the doctor, the room had never been touched since Gunga Pershad had played his last disastrous game.

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He followed the fresh footmarks up to the table, noticed that the Captain must have first sat down in the chair that was turned aside, for it had been pushed back quite recently, and the footmarks about it were a little confused. He was vaguely conscious of something unnatural, and then realised suddenly that though the steps had led up to the table they were neither continued nor retraced. The dust lay undisturbed everywhere else—the fine grey Indian dust that gathers thickly even in a few hours if unopposed; and yet Captain Bogle was not present.

The doctor stood completely puzzled, gazing with attention at the tracks that were unmistakably in one direction only. Then he lifted up his voice and called the Captain by name again and again. His voice echoed through the lofty rooms; but there was no reply, except the scream of a frightened starling that had built its nest in a ventilator in the ceiling. He picked his way carefully back, stepping as far as possible in his own footmarks, and looked into the other rooms that led from the entrance hall. There was nothing but silence, emptiness, undisturbed dust.

Captain Bogle was not in the bungalow, and with a feeling of resentful bewilderment the doctor

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drove off to fetch Petersham, after giving the waiting servants orders that no one was to enter the house until his return. He brought the police officer back with him, and together they surveyed the single line of footsteps terminating at the table, the chair's position, the evidence of its occupant having sat down and risen hurriedly.

"The other chair hasn't been sat in," said Petersham, peering at it closely; "it's covered with dust, but those cards have only lately been dropped on the floor. Bogle came in here right enough, but how the devil did he get out again —unless he flew!"

Together the two men went over every room and every corner. They searched the roof, the garden, the stables, the outhouses; but Captain Bogle was nowhere to be found. He had disappeared completely and unaccountably, and the very last traces of him ever discovered were the footsteps in the dust that led up to the card table in the middle of the big room of Gunga Pershad's bungalow—and no farther.

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FATE'S IRONY

THE smooth, broad road lay dusty white between the avenue of shisham, tamarind, and mango trees; the air was filled with scents and sounds of the sudden Indian spring and the clamour of pilgrims bound for a sacred spot where, at this auspicious season, Mother Ganges would wash them pure from sin and protect them from adversity.

Long, narrow, low-wheeled carts, packed with women, children, and old people, made lazy creaking progress; ekkas crowded with more up-to-date travellers jingled past them; ponies ambled at the roadside with short, quick paces, their riders balanced precariously on bundles of bedding and clothes used conveniently as saddles. Mysterious hooded vehicles, ornamented with red cloth and yellow fringe, trundled along drawn by trotting bullocks of the famous Northern breed, and, if the curtains swung aside for a moment, glimpses might be caught within of delicate sallow faces with large dark eyes, and the shimmer of jewels and

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spangled muslin. The crush was thickest at the entrance to the city. There the noise was stupefying, and from the far distance, where the long flat road narrowed and closed in perspective, and the shouts of men and nasal chanting of women died away into space, the varied procession could be seen ever advancing.

Among the moving line of carts was one that held a very typical little load of passengers—four generations of a native peasant family that had tilled its own soil and lived on the same plot of ground for centuries. An old man, who looked a hundred, but was probably not more than seventy-five, shrunken and bent with years of hard work and privation, was huddled into the front part of the conveyance, swathed in a coarse cotton sheet; and next to him crouched his wife, a toothless hag, with skin a mass of wrinkles, and thin wisps of hair escaping from beneath a well-worn wrapper. The old woman and her husband had toiled, and pinched, and grumbled through a long and busy existence, and this was likely to be the aged couple's last expedition on earth. Taking up much precious room squatted an elderly widow, their only surviving child, for, though sons had grown to manhood and the daughter had married

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suitably, cholera had visited the village some years back with more than usual malignity, and the sons with their wives and children, as well as the desirable son-in-law, had been swept away; only the widowed daughter and her one son had been spared to the old people.

At the end of the cart the widow's daughter-in-law represented the third generation; she was squeezed in among the cooking vessels, bundles of fodder and clothing, and the luggage of the bullock driver, who was a distant relative, and had therefore presumed upon his powerful position as courier and protector of the party to bring more than his fair allowance. Near her, perched on one of the bundles, was a little boy of about four years old, who had a skin that was light for a native of India, enormous tawny eyes with long black lashes, and hair of a rusty brown crowned with an embroidered muslin cap; a little red jacket reached to his waist, otherwise he was naked. The child laughed and chattered, showing his pearly teeth and quick red tongue with the restless vitality that had caused him to be nick-named "Banda," or monkey; but no heed was paid to his prattle, for the rest of the party were full of anxious thought. Banda was too young

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to understand the object of the pilgrimage, which was not to seek amusement or change, but that an urgent petition might be laid before the gods, who must be propitiated by such acts of religious observance as were only possible at one of these holy gatherings.

Moti, the daughter-in-law of the widow and the mother of the little boy, was a young woman, no more than a girl according to English ideas, with a fair, oval face, straight features, and silky hair, but the buoyancy of youth was missing from her expression. Her eyes and mouth were sad, and the pose of her head was melancholy. The large dark eyes strained towards the holy city with a painful anxiety in their liquid depths, for in the village she had prayed to the gods, had made offering of all her meagre jewellery, had wept and fasted and done penance, but still her young husband, the father of her boy, the grandson of the old couple who had looked to him for support, was a prisoner in the great jail many miles distant.

Three years of Lalla's sentence had dragged away; there were seven more to run, and in the meantime the man's grandparents, his mother, his wife and child, were growing poorer, deeper into debt, and nearer to ruin. Already the land

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and crops were mortgaged, and Moti and her mother-in-law could only earn enough by daily labour in the fields to keep actual starvation from the household. So far no religious observances, propitiation, or offerings had persuaded the gods to soften the hard heart of the Sircar (Government) to set the prisoner free; and as a last hope the pilgrimage had been undertaken after much consideration, the sale of what small valuables remained in the family, and a final loan, advanced with threats and reluctance, from the money-lender.

Deep down in her heart Moti had begun to distrust the gods, but to say so might bring further misfortune, and even to think such blasphemy was dangerous. She felt very hopeless. Her being ached for a sight of her man, her courage failed when she watched the little boy and thought of the child's future. Unless Lalla should be pardoned miraculously, they would all be beggars when he came out of prison, if they had not already died of want.

It was sunset hour when they arrived at the camping ground on the outskirts of the city that was thronged with pilgrims, priests, and travellers from every part of India, and the night was well

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advanced by the time they had found a resting-place, eaten their scanty meal, and laid down in a row to sleep beneath the cart.

Very early the next morning they rose to make preparations for the day's ceremonial, and later, clinging to each other, the little party made its way with difficulty through the noisy crowd, that nevertheless was animated by the good-tempered holiday spirit invariably displayed by the uneducated Hindu on any sort of unusual occasion. But the old people were frail and the younger women nervous, and it took them two hours to reach the steps of the bathing-place. Then they were obliged to await their turn for immersion, since they could not afford to pay for a priest to conduct them in and out of the water as well as the fee required by the professional caretaker in whose charge they left their principal garments, only retaining a light covering. At last they were carried along helplessly with the multitude down the steps to the water's edge, and in they waded, to the sound of conches and bells, the cries of praise and invocation, the roar of thousands of excited voices. The child sat astride his mother's hip, silent with alarmed wonder, the old people grabbed at each other and were supported by their

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daughter, and they all dipped, and drank, and prayed, and praised, with the rest of the seething mass of worshippers. Then they struggled out, shivering, slipping, pushing and being pushed up the flight of shallow steps that were slimy and worn with the passing, for centuries, of millions of naked feet.

On the top of the flight, in curious contrast to the Oriental surroundings, stood a group of Englishmen. Moti noticed that the priests made way for them and salaamed, that now and again orders seemed to be given by one particular sahib, and carried out by the others, and presently this sahib moved forward, leaving his companions a little way behind. She stared at him with the frank and primitive curiosity of the villager to whom a European is not a very familiar sight; and as she gazed, shuffling along with the crowd, keeping firm hold of Banda on her hip, she suddenly slipped and lost her footing. In an instant she was down on the hard, stone steps, under the multitude of trampling feet that could not be stayed. Banda screamed as he fell with his mother; she knew they must both be crushed to death, that even should the gods prove gracious and set her husband free she should never see him

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again, never hold the boy up to greet his father. The thought passed through her mind as her senses grew dull that perhaps the gods demanded the sacrifice of her life and that of the child in return for Lalla's freedom.

There came a blank; then she felt air on her forehead and opened her eyes to see a kind, grave face bending over her—the face of the same sahib whom she had seen before at the head of the steps —with steady blue eyes beneath a pith sun-hat, and lines about the clean-shaven mouth, lines of middle age, hard work, responsibility. He turned and called a few words to another sahib, who was also pushing his way in among the people, and a native policeman was summoned and bidden to take charge of her; the man was to see that she and the child were safely restored to their relations. Banda was weeping and clutching at his mother's wet garment, but he was unhurt, and she recognised this with a bewildered thankfulness the while she shrank from the constable, for he reminded her in his blue and red uniform of the terrible day when Lalla had been taken from her. But the constable was kind and did not handle her roughly; instead, he spoke words of encouragement, at the same time glancing

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furtively from beneath his eyelids to see if the sahibs were observing his considerate behaviour. He helped her through the crowd as though she herself had been one of the sahib-people.

"Thou art favoured of the gods, sister," he was saying, "for it was none other than the Commissioner-sahib himself who rescued thee from beneath the feet of the people! The Commissioner-sahib is ever a friend to those in distress; he is well known to be of a kind and charitable disposition, and few approach him who do not obtain redress for their wrongs should they be deserving of help. It were well for thee that he was at hand and saw thee fall, else now wouldest thou have been dead and the little one also. Remember that, and do not go to sleep, but tell me which be thy people that I may restore thee to them and return to my duty. To-morrow the Commissioner-sahib continues on his march of inspection, and then shall I be free to bathe and do pooja also——"

Moti heard him, but she was too dazed and bruised to answer, and he talked without ceasing till she beheld her people pressed, a frightened little group, against a wall, helplessly bewailing her non-appearance. The policeman guided her to them, and then produced a rupee.

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"Here, sister, is another proof of the sahib's kindness—a baksheesh to heal thy hurt and give thee forgetfulness of thy fear!" He laughed as he stood and waited for the usual percentage on the sum. It was given to him readily, for, according to the custom of the country, it was his by right. Toll is invariably taken on every coin that passes through native fingers.

When he had gone Moti redeemed the family wardrobe, and they re-dressed themselves, slipping off the wet garments underneath and rolling them into bundles which they carried on their heads. She spent the rest of her present at a shop near by, where food could be bought ready cooked for exhausted pilgrims, and then, restored and refreshed, and full of confidence, they began their round of worship and supplication at the various shrines.

They visited the temple of the monkey god and left their modest offering with the priest, besides purchasing a few handfuls of grain to distribute among the hundreds of brown monkeys that grinned and chattered about the building, and on the roofs and parapets of the adjoining houses. Banda laughed to see his "brothers," as his great-grandfather called them, and he forgot his recent

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terror in throwing food to them, and even feeding them from his hands, which they grabbed with cold, hard little fingers.

Afterwards they went to Kali, the goddess who, if she pleased, could work them untold evil and misfortune, and prevent their prayers to other deities from being granted; the goddess who can smite with pestilence, famine, and death, the mother of pain and sacrifice. And there they bowed themselves down in a very passion of supplication, not asking that good might come, but that it might not be prevented from coming. The bulk of the little hoard of money that had been brought for religious expenses was given to the priest for whatever sacrifices he should, in his wisdom, select as being most acceptable to the cruel power.

On they toiled from temple to temple, weary, footsore, yet still with strenuous hope, pleading, offering, doing worship to Ganesh, the kindly elephant god who, they knew, would help them if Kali would permit him; to Lakshmi, who loves happiness and good fortune, to various incarnations of the Hindu Trinity, till the money-bag was empty of all but the least that would take them home to await relief or disappointment,

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according as it might please the gods to deal with them.

Moti had joined fervidly in the prayers and praises and ceremonies, but all the time she had carried in her thoughts the memory of a grave, kind face, with eyes of sympathy and understanding. When she looked up for a minute, before doing obeisance to the hideous figures of the idols, she had seemed to meet the human gaze of the sahib who had saved her from death, instead of the cold, hard stare of painted images. When she uttered her petition, the entreaty she had come so many miles and endured such hardships to make, there rang in her ears a clear English voice with judgment, wisdom, and self-reliance in its notes. A vague purpose shaped itself in her mind as they traversed the hot streets and penetrated into the dark shrines that smelt of rancid oil, and blood, and rotting flowers. The intention grew stronger with each visit they paid to the passive deities, for beside the vision of the living man within her brain the idols seemed cold, powerless, nothing more than wood and stone.

She dared not acknowledge her heresy even to herself; she was alarmed and ashamed of her lack of faith, she fought against the weakness,

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—beat it down with innate, superstitious horror; and yet she was powerless to feel as she well knew she ought to be feeling, and as she knew her husband's people felt when they bowed themselves down in agonised supplication, vowing money, good deeds, everything that might be in their power, to the gods, if only their prayer should be heard and their beloved one given back to them.

As they left the last temple and emerged into the sunshine, Moti made her decision, her plan took definite form, but she determined as yet to remain silent. It would be time enough to speak if her design proved successful. So that night, when the old people, full of hope and faith, were settled beneath the cart, when her mother-in-law was enjoying a hookah, and the bullock-driver had gone to seek distractions in the bazaar, Moti announced that she wished once more to bathe in the holy pool and by moonlight, seeing that they were to start on the return journey next morning. The plan was not opposed, so she tucked Banda, sleepy and protesting, upon her hip, and picked her way through the mass of squatting and sleeping pilgrims towards the river. But once away from the camping ground she approached a policeman on the road, and with

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a fluttering heart inquired the way to the Commissioner-sahib's camp.

"And what is thy business with the Commissioner-sahib?" demanded the policeman.

"The water-carrier of the sahib is my brother-in-law," she lied glibly, "and I take news to him of his wife and children."

"Then continue along the city street until thou comest out at the cross roads where sits the fakir who has vowed himself to eternal silence. Then pass to the right and continue till the open ground be reached whereon is pitched the sahib's camp."

She acknowledged the man's help, and passed through the crowded town that was flaring with lights, humming with voices and footsteps. Banda hung asleep and heavy at her side, but she hitched him up and tramped bravely forward till she arrived at the cross roads, and saw the votary who was self-doomed to life-long silence sitting grim and motionless in the bright moonlight, his skin grey with the powder of ashes. She padded noiselessly along the dusty, deserted road towards the sahib's great white tents, that rose like a miniature range of snow-covered mountains from a stretch of bare ground.

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Only then did Moti's heart begin to throb and her courage to sink low. Suddenly she realised the presumption of her scheme. How could she ever have dared to think of importuning the sahib? Also the vague fear flitted through her mind that the gods might punish her on the spot for her desire to approach a being of human power while doubting those whose influence was not of the earth. She felt inclined to run back to the temples and throw herself on her face before Kali, Hanuman, Ganesh, and the rest of them, confessing her fault and begging their forgiveness. Already she had stopped, in hesitation, when she saw a figure coming slowly towards her, —a tall English figure in black with a patch of white at the breast, and a bare grey head silvered by the moon. The Commissioner-sahib himself. It was surely Fate!

The senior official had left the camp for a solitary after-dinner stroll that he might enjoy the space and quiet of the moonlit scene, and also think without interruption over a case that was troubling him. Now he was suddenly waylaid by a slim native female, who seemed to have sprung from the ground with a little sleepy child in her arms, and who knelt before him in the

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dust and cried "Dohai! Dohai!" (Justice! Justice!)

"What is the matter?" he asked, true to his reputation of ever being ready to hear a petition, however humble.

Then the woman sobbed forth her story rapidly, and with words that were impelled by sorrow.

"Sahib, Lord, Protector of the Poor! My man is in prison. Three years back did he quarrel with an enemy, a neighbour who had ever wished him ill being envious that Lalla prospered, and was good to look upon, and had courage and wisdom. This evil one wrought Lalla, my husband, an injury over a field that by every right was ours, and with false witnesses and bribery and lies did he win the field by law. Thereafter he would mock Lalla and anger him sorely, until the day came when the two fought at dawn as they went out to plough their lands, and my man, being the braver and the stronger of the two, slew his enemy on the field. He knew not that such fair dealing would be accounted murder in the eyes of the Government, and he neither fled nor concealed himself, and so was he taken suddenly by the police, and since that day have I seen him not. News was brought to us that he

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was to be in the jail for ten years, and I and my child, and my husband's mother, and his grandparents, who are old and cannot work, were left without a man to earn us money that we might live. Now have we spent our last pais in coming here to bathe and to entreat the gods to soften the heart of the Government, that they may set my Lalla free from jail to work for us. In shame and fear do I say it, but maybe the gods have not the power, and that being so we shall starve Huzoor, there will be nothing to eat, the money-lender will take the house and the land. Ai! sahib—I long for my man, for the father of my child; my heart is empty and sore, and happiness and light have gone from me. Sahib, if children be thine, remember them and have pity—intercede for my husband who is no murderer and has committed no sin; he was ever a good man."

She put the little boy down on his naked brown feet, and pushed him towards the Englishman. Banda, only half awake, looked up with large, soft eyes, and held out his chubby hands, palms upward, unconscious of what he did. Then, seeing the white stranger, he turned to his mother with a cry and hid his head. It was a curious scene: the flat, moonlit space flanked with the row of

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imposing tents, and in the foreground an Englishman, bare-headed and in evening dress, looking down upon a weeping Eastern figure, whose attitude of woe and desolation, together with the clinging child, reminded him vaguely of Hagar and Ishmael. The Commissioner thought of his wife and little son awaiting his return to England; he had married towards the end of his service, and in three months from now he was leaving India for ever, having despatched his family ahead of him that they might not travel in the heat. The ache of loneliness was in his heart, and he contemplated the unhappy woman and her boy with sympathy.

A few judicious questions elicited every detail of the grievous little story, and with his intimate knowledge of the peasant life of India the Commissioner understood it, and knew how likely it all was. The long rancour between the two men culminating in the fatal quarrel, the dismay of Lalla and his family when they found that the slaying of an enemy in fair fight was to be punished by long years of imprisonment,—a sentence probably rendered heavier by the evidence, true or false, of the dead man's relations; the prisoner now working out his time, unable to comprehend the law as applied to his own case, his smouldering

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rage, and the fierce consuming protest against what seemed to him the most bitter injustice; the thought of his wrongs turning over and over in his mind like a wheel that is never quiet, and the agonising knowledge that he was powerless to avert the evil days that must fall upon his people.

The Commissioner took out his pocket-book and wrote down the name and age of Moti's husband, as well as the names of his father and grandfather before him; the district and the village whence he had come, the jail where he was imprisoned, and every particular that the woman had given of the case.

"Next month I have to make inspection of this jail," he said kindly, "and then will I see what can be done. Meanwhile do not hope too much, for I can give no promise. Go thy way now, and news shall be sent to thee, good or bad."

He put a twenty-rupee note from the pocket-book into her hand. "For the little one," he added,—knowing that such a sum would keep the whole family for months—and turned back towards the tents.

. . . . . .

On a hot, still evening, when the blustering

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summer wind had lulled, and the dusty land was red with sunset, a camel came lurching along the village cart-track ridden by a police sowar, or trooper, magnificent in his accoutrements, his black moustache fiercely curled, his dark blue puggaree with its red fez cocked smartly over one eye. Arrived in the village street the camel knelt with noisy grumblings, the rider sprang to the ground, and, swaggering before the inquisitive little crowd that immediately surrounded him, asked for the head-man.

A dignified old villager with crisp white whiskers, and eyes that were still keen and bright, came forward, and invited the stranger to his house. "What news?" he added with anxiety, for the arrival of such a personage must portend some unusual information.

"It is the wife of one Lalla, of this village, whom I seek," said the sowar, stamping the dust from his long boots.

He followed his host to the platform in front of a mud house that was rather larger than the rest; there he squatted on his heels and accepted the hookah that was offered to him.

"The wife of Lalla, son of Mulloo, son of Piru?" said the head-man eagerly.

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"So it is written," replied the sowar with indifference, producing a piece of paper, "he who was imprisoned for the slaying of his neighbour in a quarrel, and who now is to be hanged. Where be the woman—and the man's people? I have no time to waste, for to-night must I return to head-quarters, having delivered my message."

There was first an astonished silence, then: "Lalla, the husband of Moti—to be hanged?" queried the old villager incredulously. "What madness of the Government is this? 'Is the Ganges flowing uphill?' Lalla was but sentenced to a term of imprisonment, and Moti his wife now awaits news of his freedom! Was her story then a lie?—that when they went on a pilgrimage to the holy spot to petition the gods she obtained audience of the Commissioner-sahib himself, who told her he would inquire into the case of her husband? Why, she hath never ceased to boast of the matter since her return. She even holds that it is now a slight thing if the gods were deaf to their prayers, seeing that the Commissioner-sahib will surely grant her petition instead."

The sowar laughed, and spat on the ground.

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"Well then," he said, "the Commissioner-sahib cannot grant her petition, for Lalla her husband hath even killed the sahib with his own hand, and therefore must be hanged and at once. I will tell thee how it happened. The Commissioner-sahib came with other Government sahibs to inspect the jail as is the custom; and Lalla, who hitherto had borne a good character for silence and obedience, all at once ran amok just as the sahibs entered the prison gate. He had been put to work in the garden as a mark of favour, and with his hoe did he smite at the sahib before any one could stay his hand, and the sahib fell, hurt unto death, and hath since died. Such things happen but seldom, still they do happen, and I recall how when I was on duty at Naini jail——"

"No doubt, no doubt," interrupted the headman; "but tell me, brother, is it known whether the Commissioner-sahib had the intention to inquire into the case of Lalla had this evil thing not taken place?"

"Yes, it is known. The sahib had got papers concerning the man in his pocket. Moreover, in his goodness, before he died, did he direct that money should be given to the widow of Lalla,

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the prisoner who had slain him—sufficient to keep the family from want and secure to them the house and land free of debt; a 'pinson' from the pocket of the sahib himself, he who was ever renowned for his charity and kindness of heart. Lalla will be hanged, of course, what else?—but his people will benefit from his evil act. The gods have answered the prayers of his people in a manner that they did not expect! Now, show me, father, where is the house of Lalla's grandfather, that I may deliver my message and so depart."

The old head-man gazed at the sowar as though stupefied by the news. Then he turned slowly, and pointed towards a little hut removed by the breadth of a field from the village. They could see an aged couple sitting in the doorway, and an elderly woman stood outside shading her eyes with her hand as she looked towards the sunset. A slender female figure was coming over the fields in the red light; she bore on her head a sheaf of sugar-cane, one arm was akimbo, and beside her ran a little boy, naked but for a short red jacket, who chattered, and danced, and laughed, as he kept pace with his mother's footsteps.

"That is the house," said the head-man sadly,

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"there where the old people sit in the doorway. The mother of Lalla stands outside, and Moti, his wife, comes across the fields, the woman with the little one at her side. Go, brother, deliver thy tidings quickly and be done with it."

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THE CENTIPEDE

THE Indian winter was over, and it was just at the time when the hot winds are waiting to begin, and punkah-frills are being mended and renewed, and when the up-country trains are crowded with English women and children on their way to the hills. The large hotel, wherein for a few hours I was breaking a long journey, was a well-known resting-place at a busy junction, and the ugly white building resounded with the voices of ayahs and babies. In the verandas were piled boxes and packages of every size and appearance.

I was weak from the effects of recent malaria, the night travelling had tired me, and I was resting in a cool, lofty bedroom that smelled of whitewash and bats. As I lay on the narrow webbing bedstead, that dipped in the middle like a hammock, I listened drowsily to quick sounds in the corridors, the squabbling of servants in the compound, and the chirrup of a grey squirrel that whisked industriously up and down the transparent blind

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of split bamboo that hung before the open window.

Through the blind I could see into the veranda where a pile of luggage cast a patch of shadow, and presently two ayahs, shrouded in their white garments, came and seated themselves in this shelter from the roasting sun to gossip and chew betel-nut. They had evidently but just become acquainted, and I was amused to hear them exchanging polite remarks, in affected tones, concerning the market price of food—a topic that with natives holds much the same position as does the weather amongst people in England. While they talked, the fretful wail of an infant rose and fell from a room further down the veranda.

"Thy mem-sahib cannot quiet the babba?" said one of the women when preliminary civilities were over. She was very old and shrivelled, with pock-marked features, and sunken, anxious black eyes. She looked shabby and dirty—a complete contrast to her new friend, who was young and fat, with spotless clothing and tinkling silver ornaments.

"She cannot," replied the other, and she spoke as one with a grievance, "and the child cries,

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cries, and always cries. But that the mem-sahib has been long in Hindustan and knows too much, would I place a little, a very little, opium under my finger-nail and permit the babba to suck and bite at it. Then would there be peace for all and without harm. But it is forbidden, because these sons of owls, the English, prefer their children to wail and cry till every one is dead with fatigue! It is a true saying that a demon took a monkey to wife, and the result by the grace of the gods was the English."

"Doubtless," said the old woman. "But it were wiser to do naught, whether the mem-sahib knows much or nothing at all. I am old, and was in service with the sahib-people from my girlhood upwards, and some years back did I lose my place, and receive my dismissal without pay or testimonial, only because I endeavoured to save the life of the babba that was then in my charge. Undoubtedly should I have saved her but for the ignorance and stupidity of the mem-sahib. But it is ever the same. 'Tell a lie and get sweets: tell the truth and lose your life.' Now am I forced to take humble and uncertain employment in the compound of a hotel, receiving no regular wages but only the backsheesh from

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the travellers, which is not sufficient to fill my stomach or buy me clothing for the cold weather. My life departs from me, and often do I remember with sorrow the time when I had ten rupees a month, and a blue cloth coat with red braid, and was a power in the compound, till that evil day came when I tried to cure the babba of her sickness, and was falsely told that I had caused her death. I—*I* who had loved her as a mother, who had held her in mine arms and sung her to sleep since she was born. Ai! Ai! it was long ago, but even now, when I have, maybe, eaten curried meat with my rice, which is seldom enough, God knows, do I dream of it all and awake weeping."

The younger ayah made a sound of interrogation, her mouth being too full of betel-nut to speak. I felt glad I understood the language so well, for I was curious to hear what was coming.

"The mem-sahib was young," continued the old woman in a dreary, reminiscent voice, "and the sahib but little older. They were married before they came across the black water to our country, and when the child was born they were as babes themselves, knowing nothing. The mem-sahib was very ill, and there was a nurse-mem present, and the doctor-sahib. But all of them were

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English, and none of them knew aught of the magic bead that brings easy delivery, and when I offered to fetch one costing two rupees from the bazaar, they were angered and bade me be silent or take my leave. The child proved a weakling, as I knew full well it would be, for had I not seen the evil night-bird fly over the mem-sahib's head the evening before the birth?—and also, after the little one was born, did they not permit the mother to sleep the night through, making no noise or talk to keep away bad spirits?

"But in spite of all this foolishness the child lived, though a weakling, and her eyes were blue as indigo and her hair the colour of a brass cooking vessel that has been newly rubbed. She was of a sweet and gentle disposition, and it was to me she said her first word, calling 'Ayah! ayah!' It was I who held her when she made her first steps, and it was I who knew when her first tooth came through the gum. She grew stronger when she had turned the twelve months, and all went well. In the hot weather the mem-sahib did not go away to the hills, for she was well also, and the doctor-sahib said that the child would do better in the plains, while still so

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young, than in the hills where the climate will often cause belly trouble to the very little ones.

"The babba throve through the hot season, eating her food, and laughing and playing; but when the rains came, and the air was heavy with the wet heat, she grew listless and would not eat so much or play so often, and one night she awoke crying and pointing with her little hands to her ear. The mem-sahib sent with all haste for the doctor-sahib, who was but a youth himself and could know little of the ailments of children, and he said it was cold in the ear. Cold! — when day and night the punkahs were needed, and the ice ever ran short because of the quantity that was used, and the very rain that fell was as hot water to the touch!

"The days and nights went by, and still the babba cried and beat her head, and none of the doctor-sahib's remedies caused relief. Fever came upon her also, and the father and mother were distraught. They could not now take her to the hills because she had grown too weak for the long hot journey. By day and by night I would stay with the mem-sahib as she sat white and still beside the babba, who was *behosh* (delirious), and we listened to her moanings and movements

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in her pain that could not be stilled. All the time I understood in my mind what it was that made the babba ill and caused the pain in her head, and the true remedy was known to me; but I feared to speak and tell the mem-sahib, remembering her anger about the delivery bead, and the evil spirits, and how she ever mocked at the customs of our folk during sickness. We, the people of Hindustan, know well that pain in the ear, such as the babba was suffering, is caused by a centipede that enters the head — though how, the gods alone can tell — and grows and grows till it brings death if it be not removed. There is one cure only, and that even is useless if applied too late.

"Then the hour came when the doctor-sahib told the mem-sahib something that made her weep sorely, and she said to me in her tears, 'Oh! ayah, the life is passing from my babba, and if sleep comes not to her she will die!'

"I told her: 'Mem-sahib, weep not; the child shall live!' And, saying no word of my intention I went out, during my dinner hour, into the compound to a corner where an old brick wall was falling into ruin, and I searched amongst the stones, taking care that I touched not a scorpion,

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of which there were plenty, and once moving aside as a black snake came forth, hissing, and crawled away into the grass. I beheld many evil creatures, for in the rainy season do they increase and multiply, preying one upon the other, and it is the time when snakes, and scorpions, and such like, have come to their full size.

"I turned the bricks over with care till I found that which I sought—a large centipede, yellow, and of great length, with hundreds of feet spread out from its body like wires. I caught it in the duster I had brought with me, and then I searched for its mate, knowing that the centipede, like the cobra and karait, is seldom found alone. But I looked in vain, and my food-time was nearly over, therefore was I forced to be content with that which I had got.

"I went to my outhouse and prepared the remedy. The centipede that I had caught did I fry in clarified butter, and pounded it with certain herbs, and spells written on paper, making a poultice; and I rejoiced at what I had done, for I knew that when the mixture was laid on the child's head, the centipede that was already within her brain, causing the pain and sickness, would come forth out of her ear and she would live.

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"With caution did I take the poultice into the bungalow hidden beneath my wrapper. The mem-sahib was sitting by the babba's cot, and as I entered she held up her finger and whispered to me that the little one seemed quieter and perhaps she would sleep. The tears were running down her white face, and my heart strained within me as I beheld her so weary with sorrow and watching. I desired greatly to tell her I had that beneath my wrapper which would give her back her child, but I withheld my words and urged her to lie down on her bed and rest, saying that I would watch faithfully by the babba and call her should there be need.

"But she would not move, and I sat on the floor and waited, for she had not slept for many nights, and now that the child was quieter, I thought, maybe, in the heat and silence of the afternoon she would doze. It was even as I hoped. The mem-sahib's eyes closed and her head sank down on the little one's cot. I arose and looked at the child; her breathing was quick and faint, her little face was troubled, and oh! so thin and white—white as the folds of my wrapper. The centipede was there, killing her slowly, and it was I only who had the means of saving her

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life. I looked at the mem-sahib; she lay still. Then I put the poultice on the child's head just above the ear, leaving room for the insect to crawl out, and I held it there bending low over the cot.

"My wrapper slipped from my head and fell on to the bed, touching the face of the mem-sahib, who moved, and I became frightened. I left the poultice on the little one's head, gathered up my wrapper, and went softly back to my corner. The room was very still, and the babba had ceased to stir and moan,—already was the evil one loosing his hold and preparing to issue forth. The punkah waved to and fro, and mine eyes grew heavy. I know not how it came about but I must have slept. I was awakened by a loud cry, and when I raised my head the mem-sahib was holding the babba, and screaming, and plucking at something on the child's neck.

"I ran to the bed, and saw a long yellow centipede lying just below the poultice. It had come forth, the evil one, and I cried out for gladness. Then I saw that it had fastened its poison feet into the child's flesh, and in a moment all was bewilderment and disturbance, and I cannot rightly recall what happened. The sahib ran in,

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and the doctor-sahib came at once, and they asked me questions. When I answered, and spoke truth concerning what I had done, the doctor-sahib called me bad names, and said that the child had been on the point of sleep, and might have recovered but for my wickedness. That, unwittingly, I must have brought from the ruins, in the folds of my garments, another centipede that had crawled on the bed and clung to the child's flesh, and that now would she die, and all through my fault. I—that had held her in my arms since she was born, and had guided her first steps, and heard her first utterance; I—who loved her as mine own offspring!

"I wept, and explained, and told them that the centipede had been drawn by the poultice from the child's ear; but they paid no heed, and so was I cast forth as a leper and a murderess, without character or payment, reviled and accursed for what I had not done.

"The babba died? Yes. But had the mem-sahib not screamed and clutched her when she beheld the evil one, the child would have slept on and awakened cured. The centipede that had issued forth from her ear would have crawled away doing no harm. Whereas the mem-sahib en-

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deavoured to pluck it away, and so, as is the custom of its kind, the creature clung with its poison feet, which are as red-hot wires. Thus it all happened through the foolishness and ignorance of the white people, who think they know all and that the dark people know nothing——"

The old ayah paused and looked away across the compound with troubled remembrance in her weary eyes.

"Wah! wah!" said the other, and spat red betel-nut juice on the stone floor.

A peevish cry of "Ayah—ayah," came through the doorway further down the veranda, and the younger woman rose with reluctance.

"Salaam, ayah-ji," she said with condescending civility. "It hath been pleasant talk and I would that I might remain longer, but my mem-sahib calls and her voice is impatient."

She padded away on her bare feet, and after a few moments the old ayah got up with an effort and moved stiffly out of the veranda. I watched her go, and then lay thinking of the tragic little story. Could it be true, or had I fallen asleep and dreamed it all? I rose and looked into the veranda. There stood the boxes casting

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their patch of shadow, and on the stone floor were splashes of red betel-nut juice. Through the further door came the fretful wail of an infant, and an ayah's voice crooning a native lullaby.

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KISMET

If you were a Hindu peasant you would know that nothing evil is to be traced to natural causes, and that death, disease, and disaster are solely attributable to demoniacal influences, and the caprice or displeasure of the gods. Generally speaking, bad luck may be averted by suitable propitiation of the malevolent spirits, by strict religious observance, or by the employment of counteracting spells; but there are some people who are born in the shadow of such a cloud of ill-omens that it would be useless, and even almost blasphemous, for them to expect anything but calamity through life.

Munia was one of these unfortunate individuals. I noticed her when I was visiting the great Indian jail where she was awaiting the date of her transportation to the Andaman Islands; and her youth, prettiness, and look of hopeless apathy so caught my attention that I obtained leave from the superintendent to talk with her. She answered me

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with a simplicity that was convincing, with a quiet resignation that was pitiful in its fatalism; and my knowledge of native peasant life, together with a copy of the judge's report of her case (which I was afterwards able to borrow), enabled me to picture with understanding the combination of circumstances and surroundings that led to her destruction.

At the beginning, an hour before the birth of Munia, a hare had run across her mother's path as the woman was returning from a day's weeding in the fields; at the moment of the child's appearance into the world an owl had hooted on the roof; all the following night a house-lizard had chirruped from a crack in the wall; she was born on a Saturday, and had eyes of a fatal greenish hue, which is uncommon in a low-caste native. Moreover, her father had greatly desired a son, and was she not a girl?—a fact as unfortunate for her parents as for herself, since, where there are no sons, the advent of a girl-child denotes the displeasure of the gods; and every one knows that the marriage of a poor man's daughter entails lifelong debt to the money-lender, and if she remain single she becomes a mark of dishonour to her father's house.

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Munia's parents were poor even for Indian peasants, whose usual existence is one long battle with monotonous poverty, and the good old times were over when an unwelcome girl-baby could be abandoned outside the village to the jackals and hyenas, or denied the nourishment on which her life depended,—for nowadays these matters are strictly investigated, births are registered, and fear of the English law has checked an easy method of reducing domestic expenditure.

So, under protest, the displeased parents allowed the ill-omened baby to live, and for the first two years Munia was left to roll about in the dust while her mother ground the wheat and barley, cooked and spun, and worked in the fields. The child's rusty-coloured hair fell in a tangled mass on her forehead, and stuck out in matted wisps at the back of her skull, her brilliant eyes had rims of antimony painted round them to keep away the flies, she wore a tiny jacket made of many-coloured scraps of cotton material; and a dirty twist of scarlet thread, from which hung a single cowrie shell, encircled her slender neck. Later on, when she could walk firmly, she had to make herself useful by collecting cow-dung for fuel, which she patted into cakes and put out in

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the sun to dry; and as she grew older she wore a red cotton petticoat instead of a jacket, and did some weeding in the fields, or went out to help tend the village cattle while they grazed.

When she was seven years old she was betrothed to old Hanumana, the owner of a profitable little piece of land outside the village; and though he was ill-favoured, and had but one eye, and therefore was unlucky to look upon, it was universally felt that, considering the circumstances of Munia's birth and the extreme poverty of her parents, fate had been kinder to her than she had any right to expect. Hanumana's house was built of small bricks fixed with mud, and it had a courtyard at the back—a sign of the prosperity of the owner; whereas Munia's home was merely composed of clay, and had a leaky roof and but one room, the cooking being done outside on a mud platform, which it was part of Munia's duty to plaster and keep smooth.

During the four years that elapsed between her betrothal and her marriage she heard of little else but the sacrifice her parents were making to enable them to pay even the scanty dowry that old Hanumana had consented to receive with his bride; and when Munia's mother

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died from the effects of eating green mangoes (in ignorance that the fruit had previously been bewitched), the child's lot became harder than ever. Her mother's sister came to keep house, and though custom compelled this lady to screw and scrape that the family might not ultimately be disgraced by a shabby wedding ceremony, she consoled herself for the inconvenience by beating and scolding her niece continually.

Even Munia's approaching marriage held out little hope of improvement in her existence; for old Hanumana already possessed an elderly wife named Buddoo, who was a noted scold. Indeed, the village wondered that she permitted the old man to marry again, and public curiosity rose to such a pitch that one evening, shortly before the final ceremony was to take place, Buddoo was openly interrogated on the matter at the well where the women congregated to draw water.

Buddoo shrugged her shoulders. "I am growing old," she said, "and we need a servant, Hanumana and I, and Munia is humble and obedient. I must have help in grinding the corn and tending the animals, as well as in the work of the house. 'Of two evils choose the lesser.' It was I who arranged this marriage."

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The neighbours applauded; there was a great deal of common sense in this speech.

So Munia's wedding took place with as much display as her father's meagre hoardings, added to the loan from the money-lender, would allow. She was given a new petticoat and wrapper of coarse calico, a silver nose-ring and bangle, and an amulet for her neck; but otherwise she had only exchanged one form of slavery for another. Old Hanumana paid little attention to her: he was out in his fields all day, and in the evenings he sat smoking in silence, his one eye glazed and heavy with the opium he mixed in his tobacco. Munia was completely in the power of Buddoo, who had decided to take an indefinite holiday, and the whole work of the squalid household fell on the shoulders of the little bride. The elder woman sat out in the sun and chewed betel-nut, and screamed her orders to Munia; or she lay for hours on the floor rolled up in her wadded quilt, snoring loudly, and when she awoke she would abuse the child for being lazy, and often beat her unmercifully.

Munia collected the fuel, ground the corn, cooked the food on the big hearthstones in the corner of the principal dwelling-room, polished

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the brass cooking vessels, drew and carried the water, tended the animals, and slaved from dawn till sunset. Yet apparently nothing she could do was right according to Buddoo's ideas, and at last one morning, when Hanumana had gone on a two days' journey to sell a cartload of straw, and Buddoo had been more than usually unbearable, the overdriven little drudge rebelled.

"I cannot live here!" she cried, throwing the cooking vessels aside with a clatter; and she rose to her feet, her curious eyes ablaze. "In my father's house did I work and work, and was beaten and scolded. Here it is even worse, and my days are not to be endured. Hanumana sees how you treat me, yet he says naught. 'It is a thick rope that is round my neck!' Who is to protect me?"

Buddoo was seated at the door that led into the courtyard, combing her scanty grey locks. She looked at the panting girl with an expression of outraged astonishment on her puffy, wrinkled face. Then she put down her clumsy wooden comb, and prepared for action; this kind of thing must be checked at once, or who could say where it might end? Munia must never be permitted to assert herself. She rushed at the

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child and seized her by the tight knot of hair at the back of her head, a torrent of abuse pouring from her mouth; but Munia most unexpectedly showed fight, screaming and scratching, and in a moment the combatants resembled nothing so much as a pair of infuriated cats. Fiercely the battle raged, but Buddoo was the more powerful of the two, and Munia soon found herself worsted. She ran from the house into the street, where she stood and cried bitterly.

A stranger who was passing with a basket of mangoes balanced on his head, paused, touched by the piteous appearance of the little figure with its evident distress and torn, dishevelled clothing, and he held out some of the fruit with a kindly gesture. He was a young man—brown, handsome, strong—and his sympathy, though it warmed her lonely heart, made Munia's tears flow faster. She took the fruit mechanically; the young man passed on with a nod of encouragement, and at that moment Buddoo emerged from the house.

"Aha!" she screamed, "now have I beheld thee taking gifts from thy lover. Now shall I have a fine tale to tell Hanumana on his return, and then will he cut off thy nose, if he slay thee not outright."

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"I know naught of the man," whimpered Munia; "he is no lover of mine."

For answer Buddoo pointed to the girl's throat. "Where is thine amulet? Hast thou given it to thy lover in return for mangoes? 'Thou art shameless enough to be Aunt to the Devil.'"

Munia's hand went up to her neck, and to her dismay she found that her ornament was gone. It had probably fallen off during her affray with Buddoo, but how was she to prove that? She ran into the house and searched wildly, but without success; and Buddoo watched her, mocking and laughing. Munia fell into a paroxysm of terror. She shuddered to think of what might happen should Hanumana's anger be aroused. Her amulet was gone, she had taken some mangoes from a strange man; if Hanumana chose to believe her guilty who was to prove that she was innocent? There was nothing for it but flight; and that night, when Buddoo lay snoring beneath her wadded quilt, Munia stepped quietly from the house and made for her old home at the farther end of the village.

But her father and her mother's sister refused to listen to her.

"Go back to thy husband's house," they

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shouted through the half-opened door, "and blacken not our faces with disgrace!"

"Thou wert an ill-omened being from thy birth," cried her aunt, "and must expect misfortune. How can things go well with thee? Adversity is thy lot."

And she slammed the door in her niece's face.

Munia turned away weeping, and went to the hut of her maternal uncle, an old man who was a charcoal-burner by trade, and who had once been kind to her. He had given her the pair of little blue glass bangles she had worn as a child.

The old man received her unwillingly. "Wah! wah!" he said, when she poured out her troubles. "It is bad for a wife to leave her husband's house. For if a woman but go out in the evening and return at dawn is she not accounted evil? But stay here, now thou hast come, till Hanumana return, and then will I see him and explain matters. Maybe he will give Buddoo an order to cease from annoying thee."

The charcoal-burner kept his word. He interviewed Hanumana, who, having sold his straw more profitably than he had expected to do, was in a complaisant mood and listened quietly

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to the story of his younger wife's wrongs;—with the result that he consented to warn Buddoo against ill-treating the girl, and agreed, for this once, to overlook the incident of the mangoes and the amulet. On this understanding Munia returned to her husband's house, and to all appearances she had triumphed over Buddoo.

But though the latter said little at the time, she raged inwardly, perceiving that she had made a mistake in allowing Hanumana to take a second wife in his old age, and fears assailed her concerning her own future. That Hanumana should have sided with the little upstart against herself was almost unbelievable, and not to be endured, and there was now the possible danger that he might come to favour Munia seriously—even to the extent of bequeathing to her the house and land, and the potful of rupees hidden in the wall! Such an apprehension having presented itself, Buddoo became obsessed with the desire for her co-wife's downfall, and her brain teemed with plots of the most evil nature—for there are no lengths to which the ignorant native peasant will not go when prompted by fear, jealousy, or revenge.

One night Hanumana awoke with a savage

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pain in his interior, and Buddoo, having private knowledge of what had caused the illness, doctored and tended the old man till by dawn he was almost himself again. He arose and ate his morning meal in silence, and after a mysterious whispered consultation with Buddoo, went forth to his fields without a word to Munia.

The girl was surprised that day to find Buddoo inclined to be astonishingly amiable and friendly, and, hungering for sympathy and companionship, she responded readily and without suspicion. At noon the two sat down on the doorstep, and Buddoo took Munia's head in her lap, and rubbed cocoa-nut oil into the roots of the long black hair. The village was peaceful, the air warm with the approach of the hot season, the thumping of the cotton-gin sounded clear and metallic, and the ceaseless grinding of corn told that the women had settled to work in the absence of their lords in the fields and jungles.

Munia felt happier than she had done for a long time, though she tried not to recognise the fact; for to acknowledge happiness is to arouse the enmity of the gods. But the precaution proved unavailing. Presently, in a low monotonous voice, Buddoo began to utter words that

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made Munia spring to her feet and lean trembling against the doorpost like a hunted animal.

"But I did not try to poison him—I did not —I did not!" she protested wildly. "His sickness was no fault of mine. Why should Hanumana think it of me? Thou art turning a rope into a snake!"

Buddoo spread out her hands, and lifted her shoulders.

"What can I say?" she asked. "He hath spoken. He said to me there in the morning, 'I am an old man, and have but one eye. Munia is young, and fair and faithless. Hath her amulet ever been found? "A black blanket will take no other hue"—and there is evil in her nature. Now hath she endeavoured to poison me that she may steal my wealth and seek her lover, and had it not been for thee, O Buddoo, I should have gone to the burning ground by nightfall!'" Buddoo paused to note the effect of her words, then continued impressively, "So said Hanumana thy husband, and but that I restrained him would he have killed thee at once. Now maybe he will kill thee to-night whilst thou sleepest. Didst thou not note his anger when he departed this morning?"

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Munia's golden-brown skin turned an ashy grey. She feared pain and death, and her being was shaken with terror; clutching Buddoo's scanty skirt she shuddered and gasped.

"O Buddoo, protect me! Tell me what I must do. Ai! Ai! That ever I was born! How can I stay here? I will flee into the jungle and starve." She stared with panic-stricken eyes into the elder woman's face.

"And be caught by the striped one, or hunted by the wolf?" said Buddoo with a laugh. "But truly," she added reflectively, "it is hard to know what to tell thee. Dost recall the matter of Haria who cut his wife's throat in the dwelling opposite? and of Tulsi who was hanged by her husband? Who can prove that Hanumana's sickness was not caused by thee! I fear there is no help."

Munia threw herself on the dusty ground and rolled from side to side, tearing her hair and clothes in an agony of dread.

"Listen to me," said Buddoo presently, and Munia lay with her face in the dust and listened. "Why shouldst thou lose thy life? If Hanumana were to die I would protect and care for thee as mine own daughter. There is a potful

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of rupees hidden in the wall, and the house and land are of value. His body could be taken out and buried in the courtyard without any man's knowledge."

Munia's fears for her own safety paralysed her judgment. She hastily asked for further explanations.

"Hanumana will be still feeble from the sickness, and to-night when he returns will I put more opium in his hookah that he may be drowsy and sleep quickly. Then will I show thee what to do."

Munia went about her duties that day with a heavy heart. If Hanumana lived he would kill her, and she remembered the screams of the woman whose throat had been cut by her husband in a fit of mad passion; they had haunted her waking and sleeping ever since.

When Hanumana came home in the smoky dusk Munia ran into the courtyard and crouched behind an old cart wheel, leaving Buddoo to account for her absence. Her body palpitated like that of a frightened animal till she felt that her husband must hear the beating of her heart, and come to drag her out. The minutes passed and her senses became dulled. She knew not

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for how long she had been hiding in the darkness when some one came groping close at hand, and she all but screamed with fear and relief when Buddoo's hoarse voice whispered to her that the time had come. She rose cautiously, and together they entered the dwelling-room.

In one corner, near the heap of large stones that served as a fireplace, lay Hanumana stupefied with opium, and snoring heavily. Buddoo lifted one of the stones with an effort and staggered beneath its weight. She approached the sleeping man and signed to Munia to follow her; then she put the massive stone into the girl's arms and bade her drop it on old Hanumana's head.

Munia turned sick and faint and her limbs trembled; but Buddoo jerked her elbow, and the stone crashed down on to Hanumana's temple. Munia's brain reeled. A great horror and remorse possessed her, and, as in a dream, she heard Buddoo urging her to pick up the stone and drop it again.

But, even could she have obeyed, there was no necessity, for after one shuddering movement Hanumana lay motionless beneath the stone. The blow had killed him while he slept.

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The two women stared at each other in the light of the guttering oil lamp, and Munia shrieked aloud as something warm and wet touched her feet. Buddoo clapped her hand over the girl's mouth.

"Be silent!" she breathed, "fool that thou art. See thy skirt! Why didst thou fail to fix it up at the waist as I did mine? Now it is stained! Look at it,—now will the Government people find thee out, now if he is dead wilt thou be hanged, and all through thine own owlish folly. It would be best for thee to flee and hide thyself!"

Munia gazed round the squalid room, at the murderous stone, at her stained petticoat, at the malignant face of the woman before her; and suddenly she realised that she had been trapped and used as a tool,—that her situation was now even worse than before. She was dumb with a hideous dismay, and a wild hunted impulse made her rush from the house out into the quiet village street, where the outlines of feathery plantain trees and clumps of bamboo showed against a sky that was lightening with the coming moon. As she ran down the dusty track that led towards the fields she looked back and saw

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the shadowy form of Buddoo standing in the doorway.

Munia fled on through the fields, not daring to make for the forest where the wild beasts would have had her at their mercy; and when the morning came she hid at intervals in ditches, and among bushes, until she had left the village some miles behind her. For three awful days and nights she lurked in one place of concealment after another, eating berries where she could find them, and snatching handfuls of raw grain from the outskirts of the crops during the night-time.

At last hunger made her bold, and on the fourth day she ventured into an open carrot-field and pulled up one of the roots. But hardly had she begun to devour it when she caught sight of figures clothed in dark blue, with scarlet puggarees, hastening towards her. Munia knew that they were policemen, and that they had seen her, and she ran madly, with fluttering garments and outstretched hands, till she was overtaken and made a prisoner.

She was conveyed to the nearest Court of Justice, and was there tried for the murder of her husband on the evidence of Buddoo, the dead man's first wife, who asserted that the girl had previously

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tried to poison her husband, and described how she had risen in the morning and found Munia missing, and had then discovered the lifeless body of Hanumana lying with the heavy hearth-stone crushing his head.

Munia made no defence. She admitted that the stain on her petticoat was the blood of her husband, that the stone produced in Court was the one she had dropped on his head, but she said she had done the deed at Buddoo's instigation. Of this there was no proof, and she was condemned to death, but her sentence was afterwards commuted to transportation for life.

"Who can struggle against Fate?" said Munia, when I inquired why she had declined the services of a pleader in her own defence. "Was I not born on a Saturday to the sound of an owl's hoot? and was not misfortune written on my forehead from the beginning?"

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JUSTICE

THE long day's work in field and jungle was over, the sunset meal had been prepared and eaten, and the dusty little Indian village lay quiet save for a monotonous murmur of voices, and the lowing of cattle penned into safety for the night. Light wreaths of smoke from fires that had cooked the rice and chupattis hung to the mud walls, twined among the branches of the old pipal tree, and mingled with the pungent fumes of the hookah that was being passed around the group of villagers squatted about the giant roots.

To-day this jungle hamlet, that lay far from the life of great cities and populous districts, had been stirred to intense excitement by the rare visit of an English official, whose camp now gleamed white in the mango-grove half a mile away. The head-man and elders of the village had spent busy hours in front of the great square tent wherein the magistrate had sat and received their

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petitions, examined accounts, listened to complaints, and administered justice.

Now the evening talk over the evening hookah on the spot that constituted the public meeting-place, club-house, and council-chamber of the village, was of the sahib and his curious habits, his strange clothing, the furniture in the tent, his judgments and decisions, and the offensiveness of his swaggering Mahomedan butler, who had demanded eggs and milk for his master's table.

Abstract questions concerning the white people were also earnestly discussed, such as how far the theory was correct that poison lay under their nails, which compelled them to eat with knives and forks instead of with their fingers like reasonable beings. Also whether the existence of "the Momiai-walla Sahib" was an actual fact—that dreaded Government official whose reputed duty it was to obtain plump native victims for the purpose of distilling from their brains the magic essence known as "Momiai," which is said to heal all injuries.

"Truly the ways of the English are beyond comprehension," said the head-man conclusively; "did'st remark how the sahib entered his camp

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on foot this morning, having his horse led after him? Who but an Englishman would walk when he might ride?"

He offered the hookah politely to a very old man who sat huddled beside him, wrapped in a grimy cotton sheet, and having a mummy's withered shrunken visage, though the black eyes that twinkled deep in the shrivelled face were very much alive.

"Thou, Narain Singh," continued the headman to him courteously, "hast lived longer and must therefore have seen more of the sahib-people and their customs than any of us here. What thinkest thou of their rule, and their manner of distributing justice?"

That morning Narain Singh, the patriarch, had travelled many miles across country from his village, on a pony that was little more than a foal, for the purpose of interviewing the Government representative concerning a question of land assessment that affected his little property. He had obtained audience of the sahib, attention and investigation had been promised him, and he was therefore elated in spirit, and disposed to be garrulously agreeable to his hosts. He took a bubbling pull at the hookah through his closed fist, for

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none of the company touched the mouth-piece directly with their lips.

"Without doubt the sahib-people mean well," he said graciously, "and endeavour to be just in their judgments, but 'The weevil is ground up with the flour,' and at times can they be stupid as owls and make big mistakes." He paused, with effect, and the entire attention of a respectful audience became his. "Many times have I been concerned with litigation—as witness, as defendant, as plaintiff, and again as onlooker only. And I have come to know that there is one thing which the Government with all its truth, and wisdom, and justice, can seldom understand, and that is the heart of a dark man towards an enemy!"

A murmur of interrogation went round the little circle, mingled with the gurgle of the hookah.

"Proof have I seen of this not once but often," continued the quavering voice reminiscently. "Dost recall the case of Mirat, son of Atchari, in my village?" turning to the head-man.

"Somewhat do I recall concerning it, though but faintly. Surely it was many years back? Was it not Mirat who slew his neighbour's mother, and so was hanged?"

The old man chuckled. "Truly was Mirat

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hanged though he slew not the woman, and I alone have knowledge of the truth! Throughout the years have I kept silence, but now, brothers, if it please thee, will I tell how it came to pass that Mirat was hanged for the murder of old Bitia, mother of Mulloo, because the Sircar (Government) was unable to comprehend the feeling of the dark ones towards an enemy."

"Speak, Father!" said the head-man, voicing the general wish.

The old man settled his back more comfortably against the trunk of the pipal tree. "Then it happened thus. The fields of Mirat adjoined mine own fields, and I knew him well. He was young, and gay, and handsome, and thought much of himself. He found favour in the sight of the village girls—aye, and in the sight of the older women also. Many times have I beheld him coming forth early in the mornings to work on his land, driving his plough with the small white bullocks, his skin shining brown in the sun, and a yellow marigold set above his ear. And as he worked he would sing in a voice that was high, and sweet, and carried far. He was clever too with his tongue, and in the evenings when the day's work was done, and we sat beneath our village

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pipal tree, he would tell tales and sing songs. So the neighbours favoured him—all save one, and this was Mulloo, who hated him. And the two were enemies.

"Now Mulloo was stupid and of an evil countenance, and always had he been jealous because the village favoured Mirat, and because Mirat's fields and cattle prospered; whereas Mulloo was disliked, and season after season had his crops failed and his cattle died. Some there were who held that this bad fortune was only to be expected because Bitia, the mother of Mulloo, was a widow and, it was said, a witch also. Moreover, she had but one eye, which all know is a mark of ill-omen and will cause disaster.

"The quarrel between Mirat and Mulloo arose concerning a field that divided their dwelling-places, and which was claimed by both. First Mulloo would begin to cultivate it, and Mirat would destroy the work and commence to plough for himself. Then Mulloo would also undo the labour of Mirat and turn his cattle on to the land. Thus it went on, and nothing was permitted to flourish in the plot because of the ill-feeling between these two. When they met they would revile one another from opposite ends of the fields, but there was no

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fighting or beating till Mirat's best bullock fell sick, and died as though by magic. The next morning, in the village, Mirat fell upon Mulloo as one possessed of an evil spirit, and beat him sorely, crying out that Bitia, the hag, had overlooked his beast with her one eye and so caused its death—for had he not beheld her crossing his field the night before, and in an hour from then was not his bullock dead? The anger of Mirat was hot and swift, and I and others that stood by saw the fierce light of it in his eyes, and heard him swear that he would kill the old woman, and her son, and all their relations, should any of them so much as come nigh the field again. Mulloo was in fear of his life. He covered his head and ran to a place of safety, and from thence he abused his enemy with a loud voice, and took an oath to be avenged.

"But Mirat, having cooled his anger by beating Mulloo, went on his way with laughter, repeating the saying that 'Though an enemy's words may be terrible, death still comes at the appointed time,' and from that hour he tilled the field undisturbed in the early mornings and sowed his seed, singing of love, and battle, and riches, in his strong young voice. And Mulloo listened with a dark

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face behind his mud boundary wall, and whispered that his day of reckoning was yet to come. Then Mulloo brought an action against Mirat in the Civil Courts, and after many months he lost his case and was well-nigh ruined. The field was adjudged to belong to Mirat, and Mulloo hated his enemy more bitterly than before, while Mirat laughed and triumphed.

"It was at this time that I took Lachmi, the girl widow, to dwell in my house, for my wife was old, and the work of the spinning and cooking and milking was heavy. It was at the urging of Chunia, my wife, that I took to myself a younger woman to be her co-wife and helpmeet. She was a girl whose husband had died in infancy and she was young and fair, with a face like the moon at its full, and limbs that were rounded and smooth. At first was she all humility and gratitude, and she worked well and did as she was bid by my wife; and the sweetness of her warmed my heart that was growing chill, even then, with advancing years. She would laugh, and sing, and her little hands were soft to the touch, and her eyes bright and tender as a fawn's. I loved her as I had loved Chunia, my wife, in the days when she came to me as a bride.

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"Ai! little did I suspect of the trick that was to be played on me by Mirat who was my neighbour—Mirat the bold, the handsome, with the ringing voice, and the fierce temper. Little did I guess of the treachery of Lachmi, when Mirat cast eyes of desire upon her; and I knew not that her caresses had grown false, or that the lips she gave me were yet hot with the kisses of her lover, until the evening when I beheld the two with mine own eyes in the mango grove, clasped in each other's arms.

"Behind the trunk of a tree did I wait and watch, and I heard their words of love, their mockery of me, the old man, and their arrangement for the next meeting, which was to be that night in the field of Mirat when all in my house should be sleeping. I waited and saw Mirat leave her with many a backward look of longing, whilst Lachmi gathered up the bundle of fodder she had been sent into the jungle to cut, and, raising it to her head, passed on alone into the open fields. I did not strike her down as she stood, I did not follow her to kill her, my wrath was no flame like that of Mirat my neighbour, but a slow, steady fire that does not die. With Lachmi I meant presently to deal as is the custom with such light

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women who are false to their homes. That night would I cut off her nose, so that neither Mirat nor any other man should desire to look upon her twice, and henceforth should she drudge for the household in her shame, eating the leavings of the meals, sleeping on the ground, wearing once more the coarse garments of the outcast.

"With Mirat did I plan to deal in mine own way. And that night, when the punishment of Lachmi was accomplished, and she lay in a corner of the cow-shed bleeding and moaning, did I go forth (though somewhat weakened with the struggle, for the girl was young and strong), bearing my muzzle-loading gun, for which I held a permit from the Government so that I might protect my crops from the deer and wild pigs. The moon was rising, and in the field that had caused the enmity between Mirat and Mulloo a crop of pulse, tall and vigorous as the sower thereof, showed black and thick, save where, in the corner, a patch was left uncultivated as a refuge for the spirits. I went on to the edge of this crop where the shadow was darkest, and sat down on my heels to await the coming of Mirat, who thought to meet Lachmi in his field when all in my house should be safely sleeping. And as I sat I beheld

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a man who crept along the boundary wall like a wild beast that fears the hunter, bearing something in his arms. Often did he stop and look round, and I could hear his breathing. He saw me not, though he passed near to where I sat, for I was in the shadow of the pulse-crop. The man was Mulloo, and the thing that he carried in his arms was the body of old Bitia his mother, and her head hung over to one side as though she were dead.

"I watched him cross the field, stealing along the edge of the crop, and presently he stopped. I saw him push the body of Bitia, the old woman, in amongst the pulse, and then he came back like a jackal, bending low to the ground, and looking swiftly to the right and to the left. When he reached his boundary wall he climbed it as though he were pursued by a devil, and I heard his footsteps quick and short as he ran to his hut on the other side.

"I sat on, and turned over in my mind the thing that I had seen; and understanding came to me. I knew then that Mulloo had murdered his mother and placed her body in the pulse-field, that Mirat his enemy might be accused of her death and so hanged. Had we not all heard the

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words of Mirat when he swore he would slay Bitia, or any of the people of Mulloo who set foot upon his land? I sat and pondered, and presently, as I had expected, Mirat came forth from his dwelling-place and stood at the top of the field in the moonlight, singing softly to himself. But 'Singing songs and making a bower is all unseemly without a lover': and he was waiting for Lachmi. I hid my face in my wrapper and laughed, for I knew that Lachmi was lying in the cow-shed with her beauty gone for ever, and that never more would she seek her lover in the field, or the mango-grove, or anywhere else. Whilst he stood there, singing and waiting, I crept back in the shadow of the crop to my home, knowing that I had only to keep silent for Mirat to be punished, without trouble to myself, for the injury he had wrought me, his neighbour.

"And so it happened. Old Bitia was found next morning, strangled, in the crop of pulse, and Mirat was arrested; for the field was his, and his words were remembered, and I, being called as one of the witnesses, spoke truth when I testified that Mirat had threatened to kill the old woman. Also I gave evidence that having risen on the night of the murder to scare wild pigs from my crops,

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had I beheld Mirat standing in the moonlight at the top of his field, near to where the body was found.

"As I spoke in the Court I met the eyes of the man who had stolen from me the love of Lachmi the widow, and he understood full well that there was more that I could tell if I would, but that I meant to keep silence: 'The lizard was as wide as the snake was long!'

"His defence was that Mulloo had slain the woman and placed her body in the field to bring trouble upon him, the two being at enmity; and the district judge, who had seen much, and knew more than most Feringhees concerning the hearts of black people, said that it might well be. And so the case went up to the High Court, while Mirat remained in prison. The judge-sahibs of the High Court ruled that such a thing was not possible; that no man, black or white, would murder his own mother to be avenged on his neighbour, and the evidence being strong against Mirat, they sentenced him to be hanged.

"On the morning when Mirat was to die, Lachmi went forth as usual into the jungle to cut grass for the beasts, and she never returned. What became of her I know not to this day, nor did it

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greatly matter, for there are widows in plenty, and Chunia my wife chose another woman who was strong and faithful, but neither young nor fair.

"As for Mulloo, now that the evil influence of his mother's one eye had been removed, his crops flourished and his cattle prospered; also he purchased the field that had been Mirat's, which yielded a rich return, so that when he died, full of years, his son and his son's sons inherited wealth.

"So is it true what I have said—that there are few white men who can see into the heart of a dark man desiring to be avenged on an enemy; and that though the sahib-people mean well, and endeavour to be just and sound in their judgments, sometimes can they be stupid as owls and make mistakes. But though Mirat had not killed Bitia, the old woman, still had he tricked me, Narain Singh, his neighbour, and defiled the honour of my house; and 'It is sin whether you steal oil or sugar.' Therefore, to my mind, was he deservedly punished—and without further trouble or undertaking on my part. What sayest thou, O my brothers?"

A chorus of approval arose from the little crowd of listeners, and the hookah gurgled freely as it passed from hand to hand.

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"It were well done," said the head-man graciously; and at the same time he drew his wrapper closer about his shoulders. "The night grows chilly," he added, restraining a yawn, "and the hour of crow-caw will soon be at hand. Come, let us sleep."

THE END

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"It were well done," said the head-man graciously; and at the same time he drew his wrapper closer about his shoulders. "The night grows chilly," he added, restraining a yawn, "and the hour of crow-caw will soon be at hand. Come, let us sleep."

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